

EMCC, Baseball & the Guy Who Loves Numbers



SCOOPA – Corey Luke loves two things better than anything else – baseball and numbers.

“He’s always been good with numbers. I guess you could say he grew up around numbers. I worked at a bank when he was growing up, and he was always fascinated with that. He would come to work with me and watch what all went on,” said Corey’s mother, Brenda Luke.

“Brad Copeland is a vice president at the bank now, but back then he was a teller. He spent time with Corey. Brad would show him how something worked at the bank, and then they’d throw a baseball back and forth in the lobby. Of course, this was a long time ago ... I don’t think they play catch in the lobby anymore.”

A resident of Preston in Kemper County, Corey Luke was one of 250 students who graduated Saturday at East Mississippi Community College’s Scooba campus.

The next phase of Luke’s education will come at Mississippi State University, where he will pursue a bachelor’s degree in accounting.

“All through school, I was pretty good at math. In high school, one of my teachers noticed and talked me into taking her accounting course. I liked it, and I aced the class,” Luke said.

“Then I came to EMCC and took accounting, and decided I wanted to become an accountant. It’s something I’m interested in, and you can make a good living. But I don’t like literature. I can pretty much get a grip on anything I read, I just don’t enjoy it.”

Corey’s dislike for reading didn’t keep him from winning the British Literature Student of the Year award, although his instructor couldn’t resist poking fun at him on Awards Day.

“When I presented the other literature award, I told you that its recipient and I shared a love of classic novels and poetry and drama,” said instructor Janet Briggs. “Corey Luke, on the other hand, does not love literature, at all, but he applied himself and ended up with an average of almost 100 percent.”

EMCC GRADUATION

EMCC holds three graduation ceremonies in May, two at the Golden Triangle campus and one at the Scooba campus.

Golden Triangle students graduated May 7.

Commencement ceremonies at the Scooba campus were May 8 at 10 a.m.

Of the nearly 700 EMCC students who graduated this academic year, 250 of them attended the college’s Scooba campus or Naval Air Station Meridian branch location.

More than 30 percent graduated with honors, indicating a GPA of 3.2 or higher.

Graduates at EMCC’s Scooba campus included 169 academic students and 81 career-technical students.

JUCO athletics

Corey Luke pitched for the EMCC baseball team. He averaged a strikeout per inning, and opposing batters only hit .214 against him. Luke also had a respectable 4.12 earned run average.

But, as EMCC President Dr. Rick Young says, statistics don't tell the whole story when it comes to athletics in Lion Country.

"JUCO sports aren't like sports played anywhere else in the world. They happen on small campuses in small, often rural places. They happen at community colleges where everything, inside and outside the classroom, is an opportunity to teach," Young said.

"At places like EMCC, a baseball field is more than acres of carefully tended grass. It's an outdoor laboratory where young men learn teamwork, responsibility and leadership, self-reliance and pride. And our athletes know that academics always come first."

Corey Luke excelled in the classroom, as well, earning magna cum laude honors and choosing MSU for its accounting program – although he will be an invited walk-on for the Bulldog baseball team.

EMCC family

People who become a part of EMCC tend to stay involved, with whole families and generations of families attending college in Scooba.

Corey Luke's half-sister, Amanda Puckett, graduated from EMCC. His father, Mark Luke, is an EMCC alum, as are Mark's brothers and sisters – Bobby Luke, Ray Luke, Joy Luke and Linda McKee. Corey's second cousin, Kemper County District 4 Supervisor Mike Luke, graduated from EMCC. And Corey's uncle, Vanzee Luke, served on East Mississippi's Board of Trustees.

This kind family connection isn't unusual at EMCC.

Melinda Sciple is the registrar at the Scooba campus. Her mother, Hortense Moore McMurtry, attended EMCC. Melinda and her three sisters are all EMCC alums, and her son, Christopher Sciple, graduated from EMCC in 2008.

Remember Janet Briggs, who gave Corey a hard time on Awards Day? Her son, Brandon, graduated from EMCC last year, and Brandon's grandmother, Robbye Faye Aust Briggs, was a Scooba cheerleader back in the day.

Janie Hailey-Tarlton is a reading comprehension instructor whose EMCC roots go back three generations.

"My great-grandfather, Andrew Wade Hailey, was on the school board when EMCC was Kemper County Agricultural High School. His son and my paternal grandfather, Howard Davis Hailey, attended Kemper County Agricultural High School, as did his six brother brothers. The oldest brother, Claude Miller Hailey, received the first diploma issued by what was then East Mississippi Junior College – and was nicknamed 'Scooba Hailey' for the remainder of his life," Tarlton said.

"My father, Howard Murray Hailey Sr., and my mother, Dorothy Faye Stewart Hailey, my two brothers, Howard Murray Hailey II and Carroll Wyatt Hailey, all attended school here. My father was proud to serve on the EMCC Board of Trustees for 20 years, and he was still on the board when I graduated from EMCC in 1989."

There are a hundred stories like this at EMCC, and graduation is always tinged with a little sadness. But, as one instructor observed on Saturday, "We'll see the younger brothers and sisters soon enough."

In the photo:

NEXT STOP ... MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

Corey Luke of Preston graduated magna cum laude from East Mississippi Community College in Scooba. A pitcher on the EMCC baseball team, he averaged a strikeout per inning, and opposing batters only hit .214 against him. Luke's next stop is Mississippi State University, where he will major in accounting and be an invited walk-on for the Bulldog baseball team.