

PRESS RELEASE

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Grandmother and Granddaughter to Graduate Together Graduating from Chicago State University becoming a family tradition for some

CHICAGO, IL (December 11, 2017) - Amid the pomp and circumstance of the fall commencement at Chicago State University, a grandmother and granddaughter from Englewood will receive their bachelor's degrees —together. Belinda Berry, a 62-year-old grandmother from Englewood will walk just a few steps ahead of her granddaughter, 25-year-old Karea Berry as each is handed a diploma — for grandmother Belinda, a degree in Business Administration, and for granddaughter Karea, Criminal Justice.

“We didn’t plan it this way, but often in Black families, as a result of the economy and low-income, we have to prioritize and make decisions that work best for our families at the time,” said grandmother Belinda acknowledging that sometimes achieving goals not only require money, but also patience and persistence.

According to Census reports and population and poverty data provided by Illinois Action for Children, the vast majority of the approximately 26,121 mostly African American residents who live in Englewood, have only some high school and some college. Of those who graduated from college, most earned two-year associate degrees. In fact, there are more residents in the south side community who never graduated from high school than there are residents who earned a bachelor’s degree. Come graduation day, that fact alone will place the Berrys in a prestigious minority — as two of an estimated 1,067 residents in Englewood with four-year degrees. “I just feel so thankful to the Lord,” says Belinda. “I’ve been sick over the last two years. Still I managed to take care of my 86-year-old uncle and, I also still managed to study and finish college. It’s just a blessing.”

Belinda not only made it to college; she also made it to the top of her class. Come Thursday, after earning a 3.8 grade point average (GPA), the anxious grandmother will graduate Magna Cum Laude. Beside her, granddaughter Karea will be on her heels in more ways than one. Also a high-achiever, Karea’s GPA is 3.4.

In the Spring of 2016 and, before that, in 2014, similar stories were told at Chicago State — parents and grandparents graduating college along with their progeny.

“It is as though family generations marching at the same time are becoming a kind of family tradition at Chicago State University,” said Interim President Dr. Rachel W. Lindsey. “I attribute these kinds of joyous family occurrences to the distinctive and essential nature of Chicago State which has long been a

vital hub in the community. We have always tried to be responsive to community needs by remaining as affordable and as accessible as possible. So when we see families moving forward and graduating together, it creates for me a warm feeling of accomplishment, and it means Chicago State University is still true to its mission and its vision, putting students first.”

For the Berrys, this graduation tradition likely won't end at the December 14 commencement. Both Belinda and Karea plan to enroll immediately in the University's graduate program. Belinda's goal is to continue in Business Administration, and Karea will look toward CSU's Clinical and Mental Health Counseling program.

“I think what you will find is that many of our alumni who, through the achievement of a higher education, are empowered not only to leave difficult circumstances,” said Dr. Lindsey, “but are also often motivated to reach back and help others.”

Just two days after graduation and a few weeks before grad school begins, Karea is preparing to do just that. She says to “serve and protect” is part one of her dream and in a few days she plans to take the examination for becoming a Chicago police officer. Her remaining goals include adding the counseling component to her resume and parenting her young daughter.

Given their respective educational aspirations, both grandmother and granddaughter are poised to become a member of an even smaller group in Englewood — the less than 600 residents who hold a master's degree.

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About Chicago State University:

Chicago State University (CSU) is a public, comprehensive post-secondary institution that provides access to higher education for students of diverse backgrounds and educational needs. CSU fosters the intellectual development and success of its student population through a rigorous, positive, and transformative educational experience and is committed to teaching, research, service and community development including social justice, leadership and entrepreneurship. Founded in 1867 to meet the demand for a trained teaching force, Chicago State University (CSU) was originally recognized as the Chicago Teachers College. Today it is home to Illinois' oldest College of Education and stands distinctively as the state's oldest public university. CSU has traditionally maintained a record for graduating the highest percentages of Black American students in Illinois and has recently established global competitiveness as one of its four core priorities. It is currently celebrating its 150 year anniversary.

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