

Mission program changed lives

By DOUG HEMPSTEAD, OTTAWA SUN

Last Updated: March 11, 2010 4:12pm



Six months ago the best thing you could say about Marc Simoneau was he was a recovering heavy-drinking drug addict with a young daughter and a lot of good intentions.

Thursday he got what he and his family wished for — he made something of himself — and now it seems nobody can say enough about him.

Simoneau, along with Daniel Boisclair and Kathryn Graham, graduated from The Mission's food services training program, an intensive course which turns out highly employable individuals or candidates for post-secondary culinary education courses.

The three graduates were among the few who could keep themselves emotionally together during the afternoon ceremony — which began with a Confucius quote: "Our greatest glory is not in never failing, but in getting up every time we do."

Chef Tim Wasylo — an Algonquin culinary school instructor and Mission program adviser — was the first to break down.

"This feeling of pride you have right now is something that stays with you forever," said Wasylo, who brought with him two boxes of brand-new \$125 textbooks for The Mission.

In a trembling voice, he continued: "Every good meal that goes out there is a feeling of pride. Welcome to our world."

A different pride was evident on the faces of Simoneau's family, sitting in the front row.

"With what he went through, I am happy to be sitting here," said Simoneau's father Michel. He said since Marc graduated he's become more mature and responsible.

Equally emotional throughout the ceremony was Chef Ric Watson, the manager of The Mission's food services program.

"They're so happy that their lives have changed," Watson said. "When they come here they don't believe that they can. I always say the most important part of this course is self confidence, and once they get self confidence the world is theirs for the taking."

Chosen as the one to speak on behalf of all the graduates, Simoneau said he is sad to leave the program behind.

"I've learned that despite past lifestyle, you can accomplish great things with the proper support and a great deal of determination," he said. "Before I entered the program I was a recovered drug addict and a heavy drinker, now I can proudly say I have overcome these obstacles."

He credited both Watson and his family for their support, and his daughter as an inspiration.

"You guys believed in me when I didn't believe in myself."