

Former Denton student receives diploma after 39 years

Randy Rodriguez left Denton High School in 1973 to enlist in military



Dan Ford, principal of Denton High School, presents Randy Rodriguez with a high school diploma. Rodriguez was on track to earn the diploma in June 1975.

By Anthony Tosie, atosie@dentonisd.org

It took nearly 39 years, but Randy Rodriguez now can officially call himself a Denton High School graduate.

In November 1973, Rodriguez, then a Denton High junior, enlisted in the U.S. Marines, seemingly leaving the prospect of a high school diploma behind. Because of a Texas law granting graduation to veterans who dropped out of high school to serve their country, however, Rodriguez received his diploma at a small ceremony held in the school on Wednesday.

The impromptu ceremony, which included Denton ISD and Denton High administrators and staff, served a dual purpose: Rodriguez needed the diploma not only for himself, but also as part of the criteria to obtain his associate's degree from Tarrant County College.

"It was actually brought to my attention by my veteran representative at the Texas Workforce [Commission]," Rodriguez said. "We were going over my application, and she noticed I didn't have a high school diploma. She printed out a form that I filled out saying I was entitled to my diploma because I was serving in the military."

After filling out the form, Rodriguez brought it to the Denton ISD central administration building, where he was met with a former acquaintance – though he didn't know it at the time.

Sherlene Wright, the central services receptionist, greeted Rodriguez while he waited to speak with administrators, and the two began talking. After a few minutes, they realized they had been classmates at Denton High School and swapped stories. From there, district officials verified

Rodriguez's information and had a new diploma printed – and finally, well after his planned June 1975 graduation date, Rodriguez obtained his high school diploma.

Dan Ford, principal of Denton High School, noted the unusualness of the diploma only now being issued but said it was a perfect embodiment of the school's values.

"We're so honored to have someone like you out in the world representing Denton High School," he told Rodriguez. "We're proud of all you've accomplished, both in school and in your service to our country. Your commitment to education is a great example for our students."



Rodriguez moved with his family from Frisco to Denton in 1962, attending Denton ISD schools at all levels – Houston Elementary (then located near the University of North Texas), Congress Middle School (now known as Calhoun Middle School) and Denton High School. Since he left for the Marines, however, the city and school district have grown substantially – something Rodriguez sees occasionally, as his mother still lives in Denton.

As for his future plans, the newly minted Denton High graduate said he hopes to find a paralegal job after receiving his associate's degree at the end of this semester. He already has notable experience in the field, having served as an intern at the Texas Attorney General's Office in the Child Support Division. Rodriguez may also continue his education to obtain a law degree, as he said the military will pay for up to 115 more college credit hours.

There will still be a hurdle ahead of him, however: a competition with his granddaughter, who lives with Rodriguez in Willow Park and attends Aledo High School. The two have a rivalry to see who can earn better grades, but Rodriguez said he's at a disadvantage.

"The technology and all that stuff they're taught nowadays is amazing," he said. "I needed to take a math elective, so I asked my granddaughter for a calculator and she brought out this big thing, and I said, 'Man, that looks like you could control a space shuttle with it.' It's amazing what they're teaching kids today."