



Growing a leader

Adrian Thompson wanted to leave high school when he was barely a teenager — now he sits at the head of the class

By Stephanie Craven

Portland Community College student Adrian Thompson has overcome great obstacles to become the ambitious and determined man he is today.

Thompson, 18, came from humble beginnings. Raised in Tacoma, Wash., he moved often. His father was out of the picture from an early age and his mother struggled with drug addiction. It was a tough way to grow up, Thompson said.

"It was especially hard not having a male figure to look up to," he said. "As a young black man, you need someone to show you how it's done."

As a result of his tumultuous childhood, Thompson had difficulty assimilating in school and relating to his peers.

"The lack of stability wore on me and I really had no reason to succeed," he said. "I didn't have confidence or high aspirations for myself. I thought I might be an NBA or NFL player, but that was about it. My grades weren't very good and I started to draw away from academics."

Thompson attended Jefferson High School for his sophomore year, but decided to leave due to growing disinterest. His future looked bleak until a school secretary recommended Open Meadow, an alterna-

tive school in North Portland. He transferred at the end of the year, and it changed his life immensely.

Open Meadow is a private, non-profit, accredited school that helps struggling youths get back on track. Using relationship-based programs, it teaches young adults valuable educational and life skills. It was at Open Meadow that Thompson acquired a new outlook on life and a resolve to succeed.

During his senior year at Open Meadow, Thompson took two classes at PCC's Cascade Campus. He decided he would attend full-time upon graduation because he really liked the campus and thought the tuition would be more feasible than other colleges. Through Open Meadow, he has been able to take part in the Year 13 program which tracks and supports its alumni during their first year of college, according to Thompson.

Now a PCC freshman, Thompson is taking a full load and is working to fulfill the prerequisites for dentistry. The young man who formerly had disinterest in school and lacked ambition is currently earning a 4.0 grade-point average and aiming toward a career as a dentist.

Thompson's favorite course is Spanish. He applied those language skills in Ecua-

dor last year via the Pangaea Project, a leadership development and global awareness program for low-income teenagers.

Thompson acts as a coordinator for the Black Student Union and works with the Student Outreach Squad on the Cascade Campus. He's an invaluable member of the team, said Cynthia Sartin, club and programs specialist.

"Adrian is an extremely passionate and reliable person. He is also a natural leader; he is great at getting students involved on campus," Sartin said. "African American males are extremely under-represented in higher education, and as an African American male student leader, Adrian helps others see that they, too, can be successful and do belong here on the Cascade Campus."

Thompson now lives in Southeast Portland with his mother, who is in a treatment program and has been off drugs for more than a year. His father recently moved back to Portland and is working toward improving relations with his son.

Despite his rocky past, Thompson now is positive about his future. He has sage words for young people who have experienced difficult situations such as his own. ■