

# Coalinga's Kimberlee Isaac doubles up on diplomas

BY EDDIE JIMENEZ

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May 25 will be a busy graduation day for 17-year-old Kimberlee Isaac -- but she is used to being busy.

The Coalinga teenager will walk with her senior class at Faith Christian Academy in the morning and then receive her associate in arts degree from West Hills College Coalinga in the evening.

Simultaneously working toward a high school diploma and a college degree made for a hectic schedule the past four years, but Kimberlee has no regrets.

"I would get overwhelmed at times, but then I'd calm myself down and say, 'It will pay off.' "

And the heavy workload didn't stop her from excelling -- she earned a 4.0 grade-point average in high school and 3.6 GPA at West Hills.

Kimberlee will be among thousands of Valley students graduating from high schools and colleges in the next few weeks.

Her academic feat, while not unprecedented, is rare, said Erin Corea, a West Hills counselor.

"Kimberlee is definitely a go-getter," Corea said. "She's very determined and very smart."

Larry Powell, Fresno County superintendent of schools, praised Kimberlee's achievements and hard work: "High-achieving students are known for performing great feats, but it's a rarity for a student to accomplish a dual graduation of this kind."

Faith Christian Principal Tara Davis called Kimberlee "bright, sweet, charming, easy-going and strong." In attaining an associate's degree while at Faith Christian, she followed a course encouraged at the small preschool through 12th grade, Davis said.

In fact, Davis' two children -- Joshua Davis and Rebecca Davis Buckner -- took the same path and graduated from Faith Christian and West Hills in 2007. Davis' children are about a year apart in age but started school the same year.

Kimberlee's hard work paid off beyond her academic accomplishments. The \$46 per unit fee at West Hills is waived for high school students with fewer than 12 units per semester, Corea said. So the 60 units that Kimberlee earned in completing an associate's degree also saved her and her family \$2,760, Corea said.

She took most of her West Hills courses online, which gave her flexibility to juggle her classes.

Despite a busy schedule, Kimberlee lives the typical life of a high school student. She was a cheerleader, is active in the Faith Fellowship Church and plays guitar for a band through the school's chapel team and for a children's church worship.

She did miss out on some gatherings with her friends because she was studying. Staying on course took some self-discipline, she said.

"I knew I couldn't slack off because I wanted to reach my goals," she said.

Kimberlee will attend West Hills College for another year starting in August as one of six Faith Christian graduates receiving a Presidential Scholarship, an honor that pays for unit fees and \$250 for books and supplies each semester. Even though she will have a West Hills degree, she will take additional classes that are transferrable to a four-year college.

She plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in business administration. Her goal is to be an event planner.

She said her parents supported but never pressured her to complete high school and community college simultaneously.

Kimberlee's mother, Donna Isaac, credits Faith Academy for helping in her daughter's success.

"It's shaped her morals and her values," said Isaac, executive assistant to the West Hills chancellor.

Her father, Mike Isaac, said Kimberlee always has been organized and self-motivated. He said her dedication is amazing, especially for a high school student.

"She is a direct reflection of her mother," he said.

Kimberlee stayed on track to graduate from high school and community college even after her father was seriously burned in a work accident Oct. 5.

Mike Isaac, plant supervisor at Coalinga Cogeneration Co., was burned over 40% of his body when a transformer exploded. He was in Community Regional Medical Center burn unit in Fresno for more than a month and had 14 skin graft surgeries.

Relatives and friends helped care for Kimberlee and her sister, Rebecca, 14, while the family dealt with the aftermath of the horrific accident. Mike Isaac returned to work last month.

"We owe it all to God," Donna Isaac said. "It's a fabulous story of faith and healing and miracles."

Said Mike Isaac, "We never questioned why it happened. We've just moved on."

Kimberlee said she prayed a lot for her father and tried to focus on her classes despite the ordeal. She is thankful that he is alive and recovering -- and that "he is around to see my graduations."