

## Diploma mills

**Not everyone believes Wyoming is sincere about cleaning up bogus degree sellers**

At least Wyoming is not the only place "students" can buy bogus mail order degrees (diplomas). It appears that some Division 1 athletes may have paid a few hundred dollars each to gain a high school diploma - one that was readily accepted at the football factories in satisfaction of education that never happened. Run a 4.3 40 meters or put an elbow above the rim and it's amazing how well an athlete did in high school. Even when classmates swear they never saw the jock in class or taking the ACT's, what's a little cheating when it comes to a winning season?

Unless a whole planeload of Wyoming legislators took another trip to London, Dubai, UAE and Pakistan, it actually looks like there's real potential for eliminating the safe haven laws that benefit degree sellers and force them to shape up or ship out. They will, almost without exception, ship out. They are incapable of meeting any standards required to become accredited by a legitimate accreditation agency.

It is hoped that Wyoming would not embrace adult filmmakers to the state just because they might be "economic development." That is the most common argument used in favor of the illegitimate degree sellers. There is some economic development that should be unwelcome and this is one.

Between being home base for more diploma mill operations than almost any other state, Cheyenne city officials have sanctioned the purchase of bogus master's degrees. Given an opportunity to disavow such behavior when police chief Bob Fecht bought such a degree from Lacrosse University, the mayor and others readily endorsed such action.

In states that take fleecing the public for documents without value, indictments are raining down on similar "institutions." In Spokane, home of a recently recalled

mayor, eight people were recently indicted for "operating Internet-based diploma mills, making millions by selling bogus college degrees and 'defrauding consumers worldwide'," according to the U.S. Attorney's office.

What is the difference in what the Spokane operation was doing and what goes on in Cheyenne or to Cheyenne taxpayers to benefit a police chief? The address.

A pair near Spokane were accused of a "conspiracy to launder more than \$1 million they collected from selling bogus degrees." Of, "conspiring to commit wire and mail fraud ..." Their daughter, a high-school dropout herself, worked for them as an "evaluator" for applicants seeking bogus high school and college degrees.

The group entrapped a Liberian diplomat into seeking bribes so they could use Liberia to "accredit their various diploma mills and sell accreditations to similar on-line operations."

Lacrosse University has a bogus accreditation - one which they continue to tout.

A "graduate" of Lacrosse was hired to be head men's basketball coach at the University of Louisiana-Lafayette (a city that benefitted from the generosity of Cheyenne residents after Hurricane Katrina). He was fired when the school realized that the degree was meaningless.

The police chief in Cheyenne is not the first - and won't be the last - person with a bachelor's degree from a legitimate university - to be taken in by a non-existent degree-selling on-line operation. But Cheyenne is probably the only City that has paid for the purchase and then defended its action. And because of the tolerance for these bogus operations, many in the nation don't believe Wyoming will shed the reputation. We seem to relish it.

## Triumph High School ...

### Transportation for Humanity

The telephone message, with several days notice, invited the Cheyenne Herald to cover an event at Triumph High School that might have local interest.

So, on Tuesday, December 20, 2005, at 11:15 am, I went to observe a project of which I had been unfamiliar. I don't go to many gatherings like this one but I knew I'd be able to interview someone about what I would see, so made the journey.

They call the project "Transportation for Humanity," and this marked the third year for the endeavor. Students at Triumph who are in Auto Tech or Auto Body classes repair and refurbish vehicles that are donated to the school and then present them to a needy individual or family.

Some of the mechanical work is performed at the east side of Triumph High School - still operating at 22nd and Morrie - between the east parking lot and the school building. A concrete slab serves as the service area and, weather permitting, the process of repairing these donated cars (sometimes pickups) begins.

The work study continues at Laramie County Community College where the facilities and tools are much more appropriate for what these students are attempting. And the Triumph instructor who shepherds this project from beginning to end wanted to be certain to give LCCC their proper credit. He said that without that cooperation and those facilities, this student-inspired effort could not be accomplished.

The repairs do not include major engine overhauls but much work can be done short of that. And the body and interior is also improved. The body work includes pinstripping and similar.

A school quarter is dedicated to preparing these vehicles for donation. The class has another car they expect to have ready to provide someone in the Spring.

Selection of recipients is handled by outsiders, including the United Way and social agencies. Applications are considered and Triumph personnel are not involved in the selection in any way. That may be as tough as fixing up the cars.

The class has a maximum of 15 at the beginning but jobs and other issues may reduce the numbers before completion. Most are young men but there are also some young women involved. The pride in completion is evident - even emotional.

On this day, a mother of five was there to accept her 1989 Mercury Sable and a young man who needed transportation to get to classes and work was provided a 1993 Plymouth Sundance. Both cars (pictured below) were very nice looking inside and out, had safe looking tires, and sounded great when they were started.

Local businesses provide many needed parts, supplies and materials. Sidle's, Lightning Lube, Monk's Auto Glass, Elite Auto Glass, Action Auto Parts and others donate to this worthwhile project.

*Dave Featherly*



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