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20-year Army veteran is college's valedictorian

By Chris Guanche, Forum Publishing Group

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When Darlene Goebel joined the Army in 1985, she had no clue what working in logistics would entail.

As a young mother out of high school, Goebel intended to join the Army to earn money for college and study computer programming. But advice from a recruiter caused her to switch to logistics, and nearly 30 years later, it has become her career. College was always part of Goebel's plan, but it was pushed back as her family grew to three children and she was deployed across the U.S. and in Germany and South Korea.

But after retiring in 2005, Goebel wanted to turn her focus back to the college degree she'd never gotten. She recently graduated as valedictorian from Keiser University's Pembroke Pines campus with a degree in business administration.

"I had enough logistics experience to obtain good jobs," Goebel said. "But I was dotting that 'i' and tying it in with education."

Goebel went to school using funds from the Post-9/11 GI Bill and was joined by several other veterans on campus.

"We had a really good support system," she said.

Veterans make up about 20 percent of the Keiser student body, said Michele Morgan, the college's associate vice chancellor of operations. Popular majors for veterans include criminal justice, business programs, nursing and golf course management. Veterans choosing criminal justice in large numbers comes as no surprise, she said.

"It's heavily weighted to being consistent with their past experience in the military," Morgan said.

Goebel's decision to leave the Army after 20 years was mainly due to her children. With a changing family situation and a potential deployment to Iraq, Goebel didn't want her children to keep moving around and changing schools.

"I wanted that stability for them," she said. "I was afraid of them losing their roots."

Goebel had set her sights on being valedictorian from the start, but her focus shifted somewhat when she became a grandmother. Welcoming a granddaughter into the family quickly became the happiest moment of her life. But as graduation approached, it was overshadowed by what would become the saddest moment — the death of her father.

"My father has always been my biggest cheerleader," Goebel said. "He believed I had no limits to what I could achieve."

Goebel had briefly considered not attending graduation, but she decided to make that walk. Since her retirement, she's been working as a civilian with the Department of Defense. Equipped with a college degree, she plans to earn a master's degree at Fort Lee's Army Logistics University in Virginia.

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