

PRESS RELEASE

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Mother and Daughter Graduate From Chicago State University Together *A Story of Grit and Determination*

(Chicago, IL) – A Chicago mother and daughter from Chatham will receive their bachelor’s degrees together. On Thursday, May 10, 2018, Joya Knox, a 54-year-old mother will receive her degree just moments ahead of her daughter, 37-year-old Leza Knox as each is handed a diploma for their degree in Business Administration.

Neither Joya nor Leza followed the traditional four-year path to graduation. After one year in college, Joya started a family and spent her time working and taking care of her daughter. She worked for several years in business before deciding to return to school to obtain her bachelor’s degree. Her decision to attend Chicago State University was an easy one.

“I grew up on the south side of Chicago,” said Joya. “Chicago State has always been a place known for its nurturing faculty and I wanted to attend a university where I knew I would be known by name and not by number. I encouraged my daughter to apply to Chicago State as well. I was confident that CSU would give her the positive experience she needed.”

After 19 years, despite life challenges, Leza was determined to complete her degree. She started her academic career after high school at a local private university where she felt misguided and dropped out after investing two years. Eager to pursue a degree, she took classes at her local community college while working, received a promotion and excelled as a Conflicts Paralegal. Notwithstanding her success, Leza lost her job during the 2008 recession and was forced to prioritize her academic career. She enrolled at Chicago State University in 2011, and shortly after became ill and had to take some time off to heal.

Joya, a loving mother, also took time off from school to care for her daughter. Yet determined to finish, they returned together, often studied together and encouraged each other to pick up more classes as they neared completion.

“The Knox family is an inspiration to our campus community,” said Dr. Rachel Lindsey, Interim President of Chicago State University. “Their level of commitment and ability to persevere is phenomenal and we are proud to award their degrees together as mother and daughter.”

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Both Leza and Joya attribute the success of their academic career to Mr. Roosevelt Martin, Associate Dean of the College of Business. "They were two of the most pleasant and professional students the College has had," said Martin. "It is truly an honor to call them distinguished alumni."

"It is fitting that I will receive my degree during the week of Mother's Day, because my mother has been my inspiration," said Leza. "Although we are graduating together, this degree is for her and all that she sacrificed for me."

Leza is a Conflicts Analyst and plans to pursue her masters degree in Communications. Through her experiences at the University she has discovered her passion for diversity & inclusion and relationship building through corporate relations. "I am beyond proud of my daughter for her achievement and willingness to remain focused," said Joya. "Together we are building a legacy for our family."

As for Joya, she plans to pursue her masters degree in Business Administration (MBA) and hopes to be a part of Chicago State University's first MBA class.

The University is set to launch its MBA program in January 2019.

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