



Mike McCollum

Hidelisa Rivas, left, and Isidra Espiritu cheer ACHIEVE graduates at ceremonies yesterday at Cabrillo's La Manzana Center.

Program provides a hand up to achievement for women

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Yesterday's graduation ceremonies for the 21 Latino women who completed an office skills training program may have been short, but for some of the graduates it was a long road getting there.

The women — ages 17 to 67

— received their certificates at a brief noontime ceremony at La Manzana Shopping Center plaza. The event was attended by the graduates' children, family members and friends. Cheers erupted after each elegantly dressed graduate walked up to the stage to receive her certificate.

The class was part of a pilot

program in Watsonville titled ACHIEVE, an intensive seven-month office skills training program where students also learn English.

For many of the women in the class, getting a second chance at a career seemed like a long shot. Several of them had

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worked in canneries and other jobs tied to agriculture. One of those women was Norma Aguilar.

Aguilar worked for 20 years in local food processing plants. For nine years, she worked at Monterey Mushrooms before going to Pillsbury-Green Giant, where she worked for 11 years. She lost her job two years ago when the plant laid off hundreds of workers to "down-size" its operations and move part of the plant's production to the Midwest and Mexico.

Aguilar enrolled in the ACHIEVE program in August, when the training program started.

"I feel terribly good," Aguilar said in Spanish after graduation ceremonies yesterday.

Completing the program has

inspired her. She plans to attend Cabrillo College to study business office technology and complete the two-year program.

In April 1992, Cabrillo College was given a \$100,000 grant from the Santa Cruz County Private Industry Council to start the ACHIEVE program. A few months later it opened its offices at Cabrillo's South County satellite campus, the Watsonville Center, at La Manzana Shopping Center. ACHIEVE was open to youth, older workers and adults that had minimal career and educational skills. The program will be reviewed to see if it will funded a second year.

Students were trained on state-of-the-art computers and other office equipment. They learned typing skills, WordPerfect and Lotus spreadsheet software programs. All the students are bilingual.