

Academy student surprises mom with diploma

By Gary Weckselblatt

Sumo Woodson felt he let his mom down when he didn't graduate from Quakertown Community High School last June. On Friday, he more than made it up to her.

Sumo graduated from *The Academy at Quakertown* on Friday, but kept it a secret from his mom, Stacey Woodson. Instead, he told her that she needed to be at *The Academy* for a meeting. When she arrived to see her son in a cap and gown, she said "Oh, wow" and hugged her child.

"This program gives the kids another opportunity," she said. "It's a good thing, and greatly appreciated."

Sumo agreed. "All kids should know about this," he said. "I didn't know what I was going to do when I didn't graduate. Everyone here really helped me. They pushed me and I needed that. I really appreciate it."

Not only did Sumo receive a diploma from the district, he is one of four *Academy* students who graduated from Bucks County Community College's In-School Youth Workforce Development Program.

The program is offered to 12th-grade students from Quakertown, Centennial, Bristol Borough, Bristol Township, Morrisville and Bensalem school districts. Paid work experiences, a focus on college and workforce readiness, and the opportunity to earn industry-recognized credentials are highlights of the program, and help create high potential pathways to employment.

Jaime Maddon, a Teacher On Special Assignment and *The Academy's* assistant principal, said Sumo "worked really hard. He came back determined to finish, and he did. I'm so proud of him."

QCHS Assistant Principal Stephen Kimball stopped by for Friday's special event. When Sumo saw him, he reached out to shake his hand. Mr. Kimball preferred a hug, and the two



Academy graduate Sumo Woodson, above, celebrates above with his mom and Jaime Maddon, *The Academy's* assistant principal. Below, he poses for a photo with high school assistant principal Stephen Kimball.

friends embraced. "This is awesome," he said of Sumo's accomplishment.

The district developed *The Academy* during the spring and summer. A students' initial lessons are conducted in a cyber format. Anyone needing additional help is instructed by *Academy* staff members. The format allows for a specialized, structured educational environment that focuses on individualized behavioral support, consistent expectations and clear boundaries.

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