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### **People in Recovery Celebrate Enrichment Graduation**

“This has been a wonderful experience,” said Crystal, of East House’s Career Services Program. “Joining the program was the best decision I ever made.”

Crystal was one of thirty-nine proud graduates of a unique East House Enrichment program. The graduates, in recovery from chemical dependency or mental illness, completed two weeks of intense study at RIT. These students had the opportunity to take classes in computer skills, creative writing, Spanish, drawing, public speaking, Finance, and many more subjects. The program is designed to enhance other treatment programs and encourages clients to pursue education to achieve independence and self-sufficiency.

David VanBlarcom, Vice President of Operations for the Kessler Group, and Chair of the East House Board of Directors, was keynote speaker at the graduation, held June 17<sup>th</sup> at RIT’s Ingle Auditorium. VanBlarcom reminded the graduates that “Learning is a life-long process. You have been through a lot, but you can see through this program, how much we care about you and that we value you. We encourage you to continue learning, and above all, to value and to love yourself. I wish you much success.”

Heather Driscoll, a 2004 graduate, shared reflections on her Enrichment experience, which led to her career as an Occupational Therapist. “At one point,” she says, “my only goal in life was to be a drug dealer’s girlfriend. But, once I entered East House, I learned how to show up, how to commit to something. Once I started with Enrichment, I didn’t stop. I earned my Associate’s in Occupational Therapy at Genesee Community College, earned my Bachelor’s degree in 2007,

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and I will have my Master's in 2011. It is because of programs like this, that I experienced more growth than I could ever have imagined. “

Several graduates added their comments. “I'm thankful to East House for this great opportunity, I'm thankful for you believing in me,” said Clyde. For the first time, a scholarship was presented to a graduate who made great progress and is now enrolled in classes at Monroe Community College. “I enjoyed learning again, and I'm looking forward to pursuing a career in engineering,” said Josh, the scholarship winner. The scholarship is named in honor of James Papero, retired Vice President of Human Resources at RIT, and a long time board member of East House, who initiated this program in 1996.

More than 200 guests attended the graduation, which included volunteer teachers, East House staff and Board members, graduates' family members, and guests. The audience was treated to a slide show of photographs from the classes, set to lyrics and music by a student who wishes to remain anonymous. The catchy and meaningful lyrics, however, include “You gave me hope. You picked me up. You helped me to see, all my poss-i-bil-ities.” Following the ceremony, guests enjoyed a reception in the Student Alumni Union.

The two-week program and graduation event was sponsored by M & T Bank. Funded wholly by donations, the program also received support from the Marie C. and Joseph C. Wilson Foundation, the Fred and Floy Wilmott Foundation, the Rochester Female Charitable Society, the Kessler Group, Riverton Golf Course, and Wegmans Food Market. This is the fourteenth year that East House has carried out this beneficial program.

Founded in 1966, East House is a private, non-profit rehabilitation agency that provides residential, rehabilitation and support services to individuals recovering from mental illness and/or chemical dependency. East House serves more than 1,000 clients and their families each year and is funded by New York State, Monroe County, United Way, client fees and donations. For more information, contact 256-3800, ext. 231.