

Successful graduates praise job programs

by **BERNICE TRICK**
Citizen staff

Laura McLane simply beamed Thursday when awarded a \$300 scholarship for her achievements.

The amount wasn't as important as the significance of how the award was earned by the 45-year-old Prince George single mother of two.

McLane, who received the award at a breakfast ceremony at the Civic Centre, rose from the ranks of the welfare system to holding a full-time job with LiveBridge and advancing to a supervisor team leader.

Her life turned around when she trained with Destinations — a program sponsored by Council of Tourism Association and GT Hiring Solutions mandated by the province to train and place employable people living on social assistance.

"Destinations helped open doors for me," said McLane, who trained in the Good Host and job search programs. "The program gave me the confi-

dence I was lacking. They very much believed in me," she said.

"I've been with LiveBridge since it opened in 2002, and I'm financially independent now," said McLane, who will use her scholarship money to enhance her computer skills.

McLane is one of 968 Prince George residents who have used the program since 1995 to move off income assistance and into the workforce.

The Destinations and HardHats (construction) programs have placed a total of 1,840 welfare recipients in northern B.C. and more than 21,000 across the province.

Shelton Rafferty, 36, of Prince George was living on welfare due to medical problems about 18 months ago.

"I entered the Good Hosts program and that was a turning point in my life," said Rafferty, who now works as the assistant manager of a downtown office building. "I learned to deal with issues in the

job world and improve my people skills."

Ward Walker, 40, was on welfare for two years until he got into the Destinations program.

"The key things for me was building my confidence and overcoming depression," said Walker, who now works with Synovate doing computer-assisted telephone surveys.

"I'm now working full time and earning \$1,200 to \$1,300 a month," said Walker.

Shirley Bond, Minister of Advanced Education, congratulated all clients who've completed Destinations' job replacement program.

Each is an example of British Columbians "taking steps away from income assistance towards a brighter future whether it's a trades apprenticeship in construction or employment in tourism," said Bond, MLA for Prince George-Mount Robson.

For more information, call Jack Hooper, Destinations regional manager at 562-0022 or toll free at 1-888-955-5377.