

Grad earns 6 degrees in less than 4 years

● The man with a photographic memory did it while working multiple jobs and taking care of an injured child.

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Not very many people can say they have six college degrees under their belt, and even fewer can say that they managed such a feat in three and a half years.

But Joey Johnson, an admissions recruiter for Georgia Highlands College, earned two bachelors degrees and four associates degrees in such a short amount of time and now has his sights set on medical school.

It certainly wasn't easy, the

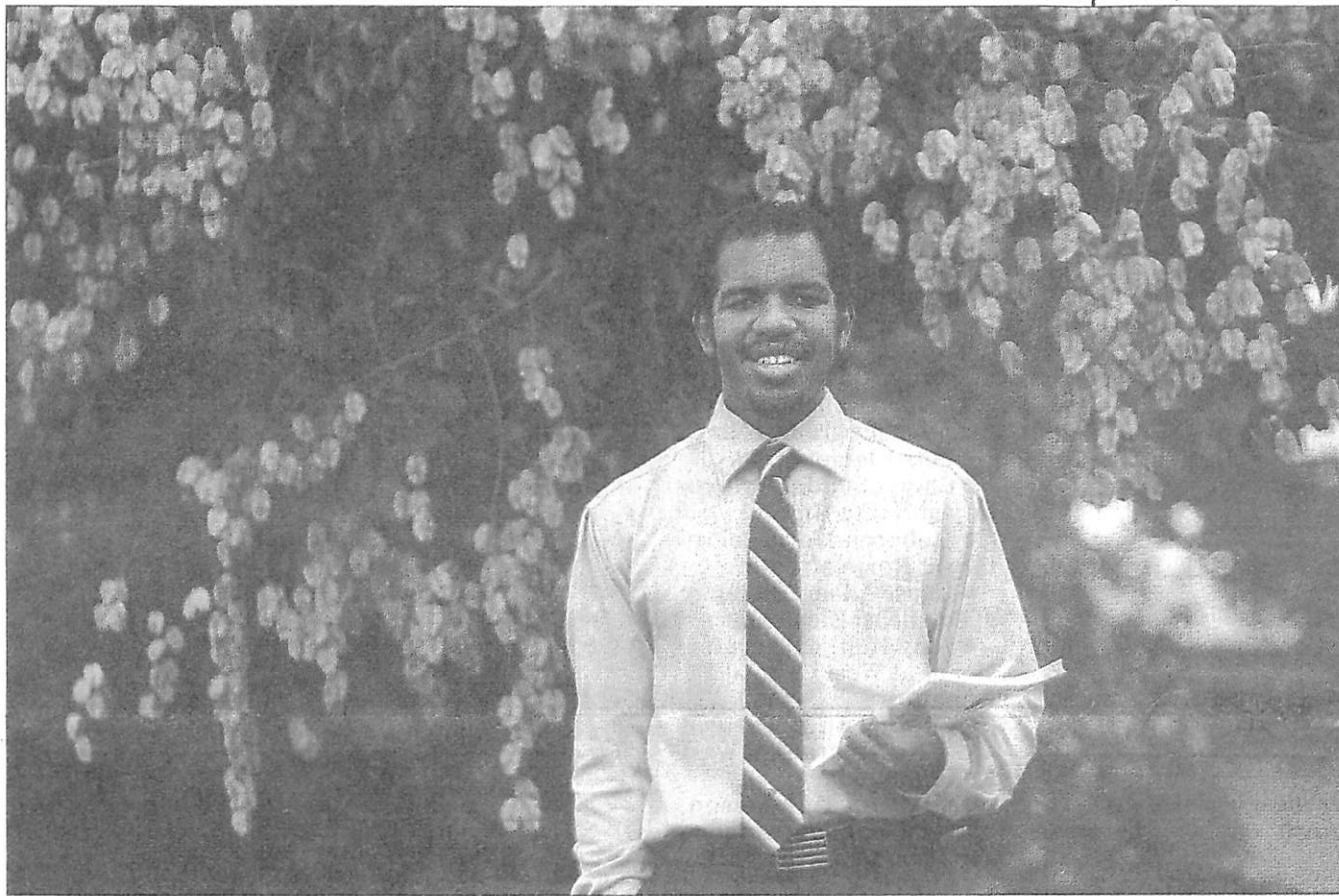
29-year-old said. Johnson found himself at some points working as many as three part time jobs and getting an average of four hours of sleep a day. But in the end, his ambition, thirst for learning and fear of his family living in poverty enabled him to persevere and earn his diplomas.

Johnson graduated from Cedartown High School and married his wife, Jes-

sica, he said. Later, the couple had their daughter, Nadine. For the first years of his marriage, Johnson said he worked making airplane tanks at Engineer Fabrics in Rockmart. He was making pretty good money, he said, but his wife thought he needed to pursue higher education.

"My wife actually made me go back to school,"

Johnson said. "She said I was too smart not to, and I told her 'I'm not going back to school. I'm making good money right here.' She told me she thought I was afraid that she would score higher than me on the entrance test. So I went to take the test and I actually did beat her by three points. So then I figured, yeah, I'll go ahead and go to school."



Brittany Hannah / Rome News-Tribune

Joey Johnson, an admissions recruiter for Georgia Highlands, earned two bachelors degrees and four associates degrees.

Running on empty

Both Johnson and his wife enrolled at Georgia Highlands, and during that first year he was in school, Johnson found himself nearly doing the impossible.

"I worked full time, third shift," Johnson said.

Please see **GRAD 3A**

"I would go to school from 8 a.m. until about 1 p.m., then come home and sleep. Then get up, go in, and I had to be at work at about 10:30 p.m. that night. My work hours were literally from about 10:30 p.m. until about 6 a.m. and then I went to school from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. I would sleep at about 4 or 5 p.m. I would get three to four hours of sleep on average during that time."

Johnson said his wife would watch their daughter while he was at work and in classes. They were able to save up some money so that he could quit working full time.

"I started working part time because I just couldn't keep up that pace for a year," he said. "I started working at Northwest Georgia Regional Hospital while it was open as an psychiatric assistant, aiding the psychiatrists out there."

He said he also worked some other part time jobs, one being at a nursing home to help make ends meet. From a very young age, he said, he had wanted to be a doctor. In fact he started working as a Certified Nurse's Assistant when he was 16 years old and still in high school.

"My wife was in school to be an RN and I was going to school to try my hand at taking pre medical classes," Johnson said. "I have wanted to be a doctor ever since I was little and this was my chance. I knew if I didn't go 100 percent this time, I would never get that opportunity again. I thought I had already given up on the dream, but my wife convinced me to go for it."

But an ordinary human being simple cannot take full class loads, work up to three jobs, sleep only four hours a day and on top of that, care for his wife and child while maintaining top grades to secure his scholarships. When asked how he managed everything on his plate, Johnson revealed something remarkable: a photographic memory.

"The way I realized I had a photographic memory, pretty much, was when I was working third shift at the mill," he said, adding that he would take his textbooks to work and study at night.

"All I would have to do was read it one time, the pages, and I would remember it from that point on," he said. "Then I aced the test. I started realizing that that wasn't normal. I never pushed myself, and I realized that wasn't normal. I began pushing myself to the max."

the rest of the surgery."

Johnson said with finances so short, he was afraid he was going to have to quit college to work full time again. But then something wonderful happened.

"I worked two to three part time jobs," he said. "I started looking at coming out of school to do full time work again, but I got a scholarship to Shorter University. That rekindled everything."

Johnson was enrolled at both Georgia Highlands and Shorter University and ended up graduating in May 2011 with Bachelor of Arts degree in liberal arts with minors in religion and philosophy, a Bachelor of Science in general studies with a minor in biology, and Associates of Arts degrees in psychology, philosophy, English and Spanish.

"Being a first generation college student, I got several scholarships, and I said 'I'm just going to give it 100 percent,'" he said. "Fear of being in poverty and not being able to help my family survive, that's a heck of a motivator. Each time that I got a scholarship, and I've gotten several scholarships along the way, I felt I would be letting the grantors down if I didn't give my 100 percent."

Johnson then applied to several medical schools and he said he decided to attend Lincoln Memorial University, an Osteopathic school, in Tennessee next fall.

Living the dream

Johnson was hired on as a recruiter for Georgia Highlands and planned to work for one year before moving to Tennessee. He said he applied for more scholarships because money was still tight from paying for Nadine's surgery.

"I ended up getting a state of Georgia scholarship where they would pay up to \$80,000 on my medical school tuition if I came back to a rural Georgia area and practice for each year that they pay," he said. "It was perfect, and Chattooga County is really where I have my eyes on. I want to go and serve in that area."

But the Johnsons weren't able to make the move this year because of finances, which means no medical school and no scholarship. However, he said Lincoln Memorial is going to hold on to his spot for next year and he plans to reapply for the scholarship.

"I am eligible for it next year," he said. "I plan on going right back there and applying for it, and hopefully the scholarship committee will see that I'm serious about practicing rural medicine."