



Touro spotlight on first pharmacy graduates
By Sarah Rohrs/Times-Herald staff writer
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Josh Speck of Vacaville once made a wish to never be bored. He got that and more when he enrolled in the charter class of Touro University's College of Pharmacy.

Fellow students picked Speck, 24, to deliver the commencement speech during Touro's ceremonies Sunday on the Mare Island campus.

The pharmacy school opened August 2005 with 64 students, 11 teachers and two staff members. Today, 340 students are enrolled, College of Pharmacy Dean Katherine Knapp said.

For the last nine years, Touro has graduated medical students, but this year is the first time pharmacy students will walk across the stage, Touro Dean of Student Services Donald Haight said.

Knapp said the charter class has been impressive. "This class has showed a tremendous amount of entrepreneurship. They've been very good to one another and they have a great work ethic," she said.

With pharmacies on every corner and in supermarkets, Speck said he is not worried about finding work. He plans to join his family's East Bay pharmacy business and may open his own pharmacy eventually. He is also securing a master's in business administration at St. Mary's College.

The job market for pharmacists is not as strong as it has been, Knapp said. Fewer jobs and employees with health insurance has led to a decline in demand, she added.

"To the best of our knowledge, our graduating seniors are finding positions, but it may be more difficult than it has in the past," Knapp said.

Sunday's commencement service is the first joint ceremony for pharmacy, education, medicine and health sciences graduates.

The service shows how far Touro has come in establishing itself as a comprehensive university, Haight said. Touro moved onto Mare Island shortly after the former naval base closed in 1996.

Sunday, Touro will graduate 243 students including 61 pharmacy students, 26 health sciences students, 27 education students, and 129 from the college of medicine, Haight said.

The ceremony will take place in the grove behind Farragut Inn. It is not open to the public.

Besides Speck, Aaron Centric will speak on behalf of medicine students.

Peter Miranda will talk for health sciences students, and Carol Puza for graduating educators.

A special presentation for retiring founding faculty member Mary Mazzotta also will be made, Haight said.

A medicine graduate, Centric said he wants his classmates to remember what brought them into the field. "We need to look at how incredibly far we've come and to bottle that up and take it with us," he said.

Contact staff writer Sarah Rohrs at srohrs@thnewsnet.com or 553-6832.