

Applause times 1,167 for QCC grads at commencement ceremony in DCU Center

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WORCESTER — Friends and families scanned the sea of soon-to-be Quinsigamond Community College graduates as they filled the DCU Center, hoping to spot their student and cheer them on.

Friday’s commencement was the 58th in the college’s history, with 846 degrees and 394 certificates being conferred to 1,167 graduates.

“Congratulations on achieving this milestone in your life journey,” President Luis Pedraja said. “You did it.”

After listening to QCC student Emilio Paquette Giambarella play the national anthem on his saxophone, Pedraja introduced Benjamin Wendorf, who teaches history at the college and gave the faculty greetings.

Wendorf reflected on President Joe Biden declaring the national emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic was over in April, but how that couldn't "wave away" the hardships the students had to face during their two years at the college.



"We stood with you on the precipice on one of the most profound historical events of your lives," Wendorf said. "We have seen you pick up the pieces during this pandemic, and put your life back together again."

He said their graduation represented their perseverance and versatility in response to "world-changing upheaval."

As a history professor, Wendorf said he could not help reflecting on how the graduates mainly came from a highly criticized generation, but who will

eventually be remembered as one of the greatest generations in history for overcoming not only the pandemic but also other historical events like financial crises and war.



Current QCC student and president of the student government association Hannah Rosenkrantz, who gave the student greetings, also reflected on what this class of graduates, and future generations, will accomplish in the future.

“We are impermanent, but we are united,” she said. “We are the generation that will advocate for equal rights...push for sustainability...to insist on affordable health care and accessible education. And my hope is that we will be a generation who leaves this world a better place for our children.”

Rosenkrantz, who didn't graduate on Friday but said she was excited to be able to share the day with her now former classmates, also encouraged the

graduates to hold onto their hopes and dreams during times of struggle, just as they had in the past.

“We’ve all got hopes and dreams,” she said. “And now, we’ve got an education that will back us.”

Graduates also heard from alumni greetings from Alumni Association President Nephtie Faustin, a 2015 graduate of QCC who went on to complete her undergraduate education at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and now lives in Atlanta.



From Haiti to Mass.

Faustin told the audience about her life, moving from Haiti to Massachusetts and eventually Georgia, and the things she learned along the way, and the dream that inspired her to move and take risks.

After dreaming about moving to Atlanta and researching the city, learning that it is one of the best cities for Black Americans, Faustin said she took a leap of faith and made the three-day journey to the new city where she knew no one.

Since moving and transferring her real estate license, she has found work and community, and explored new things like climbing Stone Mountain.

“I share this story with you to let you know that you will have to do things that no one, not even you, expected,” Faustin said. “It’s up to you to decide if you want to follow your destiny.”

Following Faustin, Pedraja gave his speech to the graduates and also reflected on the hardships they’ve had to overcome in recent years, and commended them for being able to overcome them.

Not just overcoming the pandemic, he said, but other things like having to work multiple jobs to support families, hunger and homelessness. But in spite of those struggles, they were able to finish their program.

But the degrees and certificates they were earning, he said, were not the goal of education. They may mark their achievement, but it is their lifelong journey through education that has shaped them, he said.



'Take time to enjoy today'

And while they'll have future struggles to have to overcome, he encouraged the graduates to “take time to enjoy today and celebrate. Look forward to the future.”

Judge Margaret R. Guzman gave the keynote address before the graduates walked across the stage.

Guzman, who said it was her first time speaking at a graduation, said she felt comfortable in that space because the graduates were “my people.”

She shared stories of her life and career, and the nontraditional journey she took to law school that eventually resulted in her career as a judge.

She spoke about her decision to immediately enter the workforce after high school, how she eventually grew tired of “hitting ceilings” at those jobs and not being able to advance, and how she eventually decided to go to college and had to attend one that catered to nontraditional students — similar to community colleges.

Like many of the graduates in front of her, she said, she had to work multiple part-time jobs to pay rent and put herself through law school. But, she said, that didn’t stop her.

She often faced judgment during that time, she said, but didn’t allow other people’s judgments of her to deter her from following her dreams.

Guzman said that the graduates should take “nothing off the table” and to ignore the naysayers, and do the things they way to do.

“I love my life because I live my truth,” she said. “Go and change the world, be who you want to be, and never ever ever let anyone’s judgment of you, be a judgment of yourself.”