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Rappahannock Community College

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**Rappahannock Community College Holds Combined Nurse Pinning and Health Sciences Commencement Ceremony**

Rappahannock Community College (RCC) celebrated the graduation of nurses and paramedics at Commencement exercises on May 9 at Essex High School. Forty-five individuals earned an Associate of Applied Science in Nursing (ADN), 27 earned a Practical Nursing (PN) Certificate, and 11 earned a Paramedic Career Studies Certificate (EMS).

Family, friends, faculty, staff, and RCC board members were on hand to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of the Health Sciences students. The evening began as RCC Assistant Professor of Nursing Aryah Williams performed an a cappella version of the National Anthem. Board Chair Jamie Tucker greeted the audience with her story about receiving excellent care from nursing staff. “When you’re a nurse, you know that every day you will touch a life or a life will touch yours. And I can tell you, that my life was touched by a nurse. Last year I was hospitalized for a serious surgery. It was one that required diligent care, constant checking on me, and round the clock vitals and injections,” said Tucker. “I had a nurse who was wonderful. That nurse showed me compassion, patience, and empathy. He was very skilled at what he had to do to help me. He listened. He encouraged. And he asked what more he could do to make me feel better or ease my concerns. I looked forward to when he came on shift because I knew he had my back. And I attribute much of my healing to him, for I could rest when he was on duty, knowing that I had the care I required right outside my door. And the best thing about him…he graduated from RCC’s nursing program. What I would hope for each of you, is that you would be that kind of nurse.”

Dean of Health Sciences Ellen Koehler offered words of advice, “Tonight you are surrounded by family and friends—a physical representation of support. We have been here throughout your journey, and I hope that you always feel that support.”

The nurse pinning ceremony is a symbolic welcoming of nurses by other nurses to the profession. Many students selected someone who inspired and encouraged them through their journey as their “pinners,” including family members and faculty who are nurses themselves. As each nursing student was pinned their heartfelt thank you was read to the audience. There were many stories of perseverance and resilience, including one student who upon finishing her final exam, said “I think I’m in labor,” went to the hospital, and delivered her fourth child that evening.

The EMS Paramedic graduates received a commemorative Paramedic Challenge coin provided by the Peninsulas EMS Council, Inc. The coin represents membership and identity, provides morale, and serves as a reminder of their accomplishment.

In addition to receiving their diploma and nurse pin, several students received awards. Cassandra Russell and Tiffany Kesner received the *Perseverance Award* for ADN students, and Yvette Blue and Ebonie Jones for PN. This award recognizes students who have demonstrated the highest level of perseverance in pursuit of their degrees and showed courage to ignore the obvious wisdom of turning back.

The *Preceptorship Award* is given to students who are recognized as having excellent clinical performance during their final experience in the nursing program. Amber Hixson and Kristin Tucker received the *Preceptorship Award* for ADN students and Veronica Oquendo and Benjamin Asare for PN.

Samantha Blakiewicz and Jazmin Salters were awarded the *Outstanding Clinical Achievement Award* for ADN and Kaitlyn Ketch and Cheyenne Newsome for PN. These students were selected by faculty as having demonstrated excellent clinical practices.

The Catherine Courtney Award is given in honor of Professor Emeritus Mrs. Catherine Courtney, the first nursing program faculty member. Ms. Courtney dedicated 32 years to teaching at RCC and continues her commitment to RCC as a member of the Educational Foundation board. The award recognizes students who demonstrate all-around leadership and achievement in academic, clinical, and interpersonal excellence with patients, peers, and faculty. Winners are chosen by the nursing faculty. This year’s recipients are ADN students Amber Edington and Nicole Dunmire. Ms. Courtney was on stage during the ceremony and congratulated the recipients.

Several students created a special Peer Recognition Award for a PN graduate was given to Suttinee Weik for exhibiting humor, friendliness and caring, and going out of her way to ensure everyone had the class materials, support, and snacks!

After the awards, pinning, and distribution of diplomas, each group faced the audience with lit candles symbolizing Florence Nightingale as the “lady with the lamp,” and recited their respective pledges promising to adhere to the code of ethics, do no harm, maintain confidentiality, and stive for excellence.

Dr. Shannon Kennedy, president of RCC, conferred the degrees and presented the graduates to the audience. “The value of what you provide to the community is truly immeasurable. Now, as you prepare to take your licensure exams and begin working in your field, I want to leave you with the words of Mother Theresa that I find so meaningful for healthcare providers. Mother Theresa said, ‘It is not how much you do, but how much love you put in the doing.’ Congratulations class of 2024!”

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Since 1970, Rappahannock Community College has been breaking down barriers to education in the Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck. Five degrees, 6 certificates, and 26 career and workforce studies programs are offered through RCC, in addition to nearly 40 guaranteed admissions agreements with colleges and universities across the state and region. For more information, visit rappahannock.edu.