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Rappahannock Community College Honors Graduates at 51st Commencement Ceremony

Rappahannock Community College celebrated the Class of 2023 on May 11 in two ceremonies held at Essex High School in Tappahannock. Dr. Shannon Kennedy, RCC president, conferred 550 degrees and certificates at the 51st Commencement.

In addition to family and friends, RCC faculty, staff, and College Board members were in attendance to honor the graduates. College Board Chair Jamie Tucker, representing Northumberland County, addressed the graduates. "You've worked hard while showing determination and overcoming obstacles to meet your goals," said Tucker. "Now you're on the road to achieving your dreams. Be proud."

The first student speaker, Latesha Washington expressed her thoughts about how the pandemic affected this year's graduates. "We have all experienced the effects of the global pandemic in some fashion. We have lost loved ones whom we wish were here today, transitioned to online learning due to campus closings, and missed social interaction with our peers. Despite it all we persevered," said Washington. "Many of us will be going straight into our field of study while others will continue on at a four-year university. I'm excited for the path each of us will embark upon after today. This is only the beginning."

Joseph Plumb, Army veteran, nurse, parent, and second student speaker, came to RCC to earn an Associate degree as a prerequisite to a bachelor's degree in business. "I am honored to have this moment to speak with you all. I see a diverse class full of optimism and hope. I see a class that has gained crucial skills in achieving success in life. I also see a class who has many years ahead of them to make a profound positive impact in the lives of others," Plumb told the audience.

Plumb talked about the twists and turns his journey took in order for him to realize his purpose. Then he offered a challenge. "The pursuit of knowledge is not limited to one particular time in your life. Nor is it limited to an institute of higher learning. This pursuit is a lifelong process. My standing here tonight is a testament to that," he said. "With this, I challenge each of you to continue your pursuit of knowledge. Continue to learn new things, no matter how obscure they are. Learn how to play music. Learn how to cook. Learn a new language. Learn how to build things. If you do nothing else in life, just simply learn. You will become more than you ever

imagined. Graduation is not an end, but just one of many milestones in our lives in the direction of endless possibilities.”

Dr. Charles Smith who retired from RCC last year as Dean of Health Sciences was named Professor Emeritus. He was the first Dean of Health Sciences at RCC, beginning in 2012, and during his tenure he successfully led the initial accreditation efforts for the nursing and paramedic programs. In addition to his role as dean, Smith taught at all levels of nursing and allied health education over the past 25 years.

The ceremonies concluded with remarks from Dr. Kennedy. “If you watched the movie *Hidden Figures*, you may recognize the name Katherine Johnson. Johnson was a NASA mathematician from 1953-1986 and one of the first black women to work at NASA,” said Kennedy. “She knew that once you took the first step, anything was possible. You made the decision to take that first step and attend RCC. For many, it was a giant leap. Some of you had to work a full-time job, take care of family, and come to class. Dual enrollment students juggled high school and college at the same time. As you go forward, remember, once you take that first step, anything is possible. Congratulations Class of 2023!”

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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.