

Commencement  
June 2, 2018

Please be seated.

Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to welcome you to the Community College of Vermont's 2018 commencement ceremony. I am Joyce Judy, president of CCV, and I have the distinct honor of greeting you today to celebrate our 2018 graduates.

It is a privilege to be joined by Vermont Governor, Phil Scott; today's keynote speaker, Jen Kimmich; Vermont State Colleges Chancellor Jeb Spaulding; and Vermont State Colleges board member Mike Pieciak.

Also joining me on the platform are this year's community service award recipient Martha O'Connor; the Class of 2018's student speaker, Trevor Farr; Coordinator of Academic Services Jennifer Stefani; Academic Dean Debby Stewart; faculty service award recipient Greg Stefanski; and student service award recipients Justin Bourdeau and Erin Christian.

I would also like to acknowledge the state senators and representatives from districts throughout Vermont who are joining us in the audience. Thank you for being here to celebrate CCV's Class of 2018.

Graduates, as you entered the field house this afternoon, you were greeted by members of our faculty. Your instructors, who were such an essential part of your CCV experience, join the faculty line at graduation to recognize your achievements.

In the audience to my left are the many advisors and other staff members who have encouraged and guided you throughout your time at CCV. Will all faculty and staff members please stand? I ask the graduates to join me in recognizing them.

Earlier today, some of you may have heard the bell concert performed from the University's bell tower by George Matthew, Jr. We thank him for generously sharing his time today.

I would like to extend a special thanks to all of the CCV staff, as well as the staff here at Norwich University, who organized this event. Today is the culmination of many months of hard work, and we appreciate your efforts.

Some of my favorite days at CCV are those when I have the pleasure of attending classes and interacting with all of you. A few weeks ago, I visited a political science class at the Montpelier academic center. I was reminded of the power of community at CCV.

One of our talented instructors, Bruce Baskind, led fifteen students in an impassioned discussion about the U.S. Constitution. The class included high school students, a senior citizen, and everyone in between. Students brought different backgrounds and perspectives to the conversation, but had one important desire in common: to learn, and to create a better life for themselves and their families through education.

Students were also united by challenge. Bruce later shared that like a lot of CCV students, many in his class had come through the door full of trepidation. They were unsure of their ability to succeed. When they were tasked with conducting mock Supreme Court trials, some were apprehensive at first. But they rolled up their sleeves and engaged with their ideas and with each other. As they pushed the boundaries of their comfort zones, they also discovered their potential. Many left the class with a confidence they had never felt, and a sense of belonging to a community they had never imagined.

Coming to CCV, and staying the course to complete your degree, takes a tremendous amount of courage. Joining a community full of differing opinions and experiences often requires that you stretch the boundaries of your comfort zone, but the result is often life-changing.

I've heard from many of you how much you value the different perspectives that animate your classes. You have said that actively engaging with new ideas, and new people, fosters

empowerment and a greater sense of community. What's more, you have formed a bond with the learning community you helped create at CCV, and it has been instrumental in your success.

The class of 2018 represents the same wealth of perspectives that is a hallmark of this college. You are here from all thirteen of our academic centers and from all fourteen counties of Vermont. You represent eleven other states across the country, and fifteen countries of the world. You also span generations. Our youngest graduate is 17, and our oldest is 73.

Some of you are the first in your family to graduate from college.

For one of our first generation students, Amanda Van Dien, CCV has been an important step on her path to a better future. In her early twenties, she was a young mom in a difficult marriage, and her self-confidence had crumbled. But she was inspired by her daughter to create a better life. Today, Amanda is a valued professional at the Rutland Regional Medical Center, and she has enjoyed success at CCV beyond her expectations. When she was invited to join CCV's chapter of the international honor society Phi Theta Kappa, she expressed that she had never envisioned herself achieving that kind of academic recognition. She told her advisor that she came to CCV to heal. She said "when I started at CCV, my mantra was, 'Courage does not mean having the strength to go on. It means going on when you don't have the strength.'"

Amanda is not alone in experiencing the transformative power of a CCV education. I would like to ask all of you who are the first in your family to earn a college degree to stand at this time and be recognized.

Some of you came to Vermont and to CCV from other parts of the world. We take pride in the fact that our student body represents more than 120 birth countries.

One of our new American graduates, Avezel Nabalitan, came to the U.S. in 2004. She had already begun college in her home country, the Philippines, but when she came to Vermont the language barrier made it difficult to find a job, let alone continue her education. Eventually she became employed in the medical field and decided to pursue classes at CCV, where she has excelled. She wrote, “the learning experience, and the encouragement and support from my advisor and faculty members were absolutely remarkable...My experience at CCV prepared me for the next step in my educational journey, which is to pursue my bachelor’s degree in business.”

I would like to ask all new Americans who are graduating today to stand and be recognized.

Some of you are military veterans, or are still actively serving your country.

One of today’s graduates, Sean Connolly, joined the military after being inspired to protect others following the tragic events of 9/11. He served as part of an anti-terrorism response team, and since retiring from the military, has remained committed to protecting his country by working with Homeland Security.

As the first in his family to earn a college degree, Sean has demonstrated academic excellence at CCV. He has been recognized as a leader by staff and peers alike. His advisor noted that he befriended fellow students who were refugees from other countries, and that he was a role model in his classes who led through humble, compassionate service. He met his wife in the military, and today she is also working toward her degree at CCV.

Those of you who are veterans or active service members, we are proud of what you have accomplished today, and we thank you for your service to this country. We are humbled by your courage, integrity, and commitment. I would like to ask all of you to stand at this time and be recognized.

Graduates, each and every one of you brought a unique perspective to CCV. The degree you earn today represents the hard work you put into your exams and assignments. It also represents the hard work you put into stepping outside of your comfort zone, supporting one another, and creating a community. The basic ingredients that made your classes so vibrant are the same basic ingredients that will enrich your families, your neighborhoods, and your workplaces.

We pause today to recognize your accomplishments and to celebrate this special moment. As you go forward, it is my hope that you will continue to work hard, together, to build a better future. Congratulations, Class of 2018!

At this time, I would like to invite the Governor of the State of Vermont, Phil Scott, to the podium to greet and congratulate the class of 2018. Governor Scott.

At CCV, we take great pride in our commitment to volunteerism, encouraging students, faculty, and staff to become involved with the wider community. At commencement, we honor individuals who have given their time and energy in service to others.

I would like to invite Martha O'Connor to join me at the podium.

The Community Service Award is presented each year in recognition of sustained and profound service to our state. This year it is my distinct privilege to present this award to Martha O'Connor.

Martha was born in Putney, Vermont, and graduated from UVM. She then taught school in Connecticut briefly before marrying and moving back to the Green Mountains. She has lived and worked in Brattleboro ever since. Her lifelong career as an educator and advocate has had an impact in the Brattleboro area and throughout the entire state.

This year, Martha retired after serving on the Vermont State Colleges Board of Trustees since 1999, and as chair since 2004. She has served on numerous other committees and boards, including as chair of the State Lottery Commission, chair of the State Board of Education, and trustee at UVM. Martha is a longtime friend and supporter of CCV. Her modest, no-nonsense approach to leadership has been an inspiration to the higher education community as well as to me personally.

Martha, we thank you for your service to Vermont and for your unwavering commitment to improving lives through education. It is an honor to present you with this award.

CCV faculty members are dedicated to their communities, embedding service learning opportunities in their classes, and often inspiring a desire for community engagement in their students. This year we present the Faculty Community Service Award to Greg Stefanski.

Greg serves as executive director of Laraway Youth and Family Services, which provides specialized educational, behavioral, and therapeutic programs for children and families in

Lamoille County. Under his leadership and vision, Laraway has been able to expand their influence in northern Vermont.

Greg incorporates service learning into every class he teaches at CCV. His students have engaged in projects such as preparing a meal for guests at a Hyde Park shelter; sponsoring a food drive for the Lamoille Community Food Share; and collecting items for the North Country Animal League. He is a volunteer at the Lamoille Restorative Center and is co-founder of Vermont Fatherhood.

Congratulations to Greg on receiving this award.

Many CCV students are active leaders in their centers and in their communities, and dedicate a great deal of their time and effort to engaging and supporting the people around them.

This year, we are very pleased to present the student service awards to Justin Bourdeau and Erin Christian. Will Justin and Erin please join me at the podium?

Justin Bourdeau says that as a high school student, he was quiet and shy. Today, you could say the opposite. At CCV, Justin has discovered a love of connecting with others. He served on the Community of Student Representatives and has been an integral part of middle school Access Days, new student orientations, and outreach events. Justin has been a peer academic mentor for Morrisville's Man Up program, which supports young men in Lamoille County as they embark on their college careers. In 2016, he joined me at the statehouse as a representative of the Man Up program at Governor Shumlin's State of the State address.

Justin is the recipient of a 2018 Leadership Scholarship at CCV, and recently traveled to France with the spring study abroad class. He graduates today with a degree in business, and plans to transfer to Northern Vermont University-Johnson.

Erin Christian began her journey at CCV-Montpelier in 2015. She was apprehensive about starting college, but has demonstrated that she is a leader who is determined to succeed and set a positive example for others. She was active in the Community of Student Representatives and served as a Student Orientation Leader and tutor in the Learning Center. She was also a Job Hunt Helper at the Barre City Library. Erin received one of CCV's 2017 Leadership Scholarships.

She graduates today with a degree in STEM studies, and plans to continue on this path at Vermont Technical College.

Congratulations to both of you on receiving this award. We wish you the best of luck.

Graduates, today you become CCV alumni. In that role, you will always be members of the CCV community. With generous support from past graduates, every year we award the alumni scholarship to graduates who plan to continue their education at a four-year college.

This year, we are proud to award the alumni scholarship to Paige Mattson, Brook Mecca, and Jessica Vest. Will they please join me on the platform?

Paige Mattson studied at our Rutland center, and earns a degree today in liberal studies. She will transfer to Castleton University in the fall, where she will be enrolled in the nursing program.

Brook Mecca is from our Winooski center. She is earning her degree in liberal studies, and will transfer to UVM to study business with a concentration in accounting.

Jessica Vest graduates from our Montpelier center and is earning her degree in early childhood education. She will continue at Northern Vermont University-Johnson, where she plans to study psychology.

Congratulations to Paige, Brook, and Jessica on receiving the 2018 Alumni Scholarships.

Now, graduates, you will hear from one of your own. The Student Speaker for the Class of 2018 is Trevor Farr, from CCV's Middlebury academic center.

Here to introduce Trevor is Coordinator of Academic Services Jennifer Stefani.

At this time, I am pleased to introduce our keynote speaker, Jen Kimmich.

Jen grew up in Barre and is a graduate of UVM. Today she is CEO and co-founder of the Alchemist Brewery and co-founder and board chair of the Alchemist Foundation, which aims to expand educational and economic opportunity for local youth. She is actively involved with organizations like Main Street Alliance, the Workforce Development Board, and the Vermont Public Interest Research Group. She is an advocate for working Vermonters, for the environment, and for the well-being of the state. Most impressively, she and her husband are dedicated to modeling these values in their business practices.

After I asked Jen to be our speaker, I found out that she has a deeper connection to CCV. She told me that her mother was one of the earliest graduates of CCV, and went on to earn her bachelor's and master's degrees and have a distinguished career teaching emotionally handicapped youth.

We are pleased to have Jen here today to address the Class of 2018. Jen.

2018 marks the third year of the CCV chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, an international honor society for community college students who demonstrate academic integrity and excellence. You likely noticed when these students entered the field house that they are wearing yellow stoles, which symbolize their membership in PTK. Will all graduating members of Phi Theta Kappa stand at this time to be recognized?

It is now time to turn our attention to the awarding of degrees. I congratulate each of you on the recognition you earn today, as do the many others who have helped you along the way to this moment. I ask the families, friends, and supporters of our graduates to rise. Graduates, please join me in thanking them.

CCV has a long-standing tradition that you will share in today. As you leave the platform after receiving your diplomas, CCV staff members will present you with a red carnation. This flower is a symbol of the many people in your lives who have helped you reach this day.

Now, Academic Dean Debby Stewart will present the class of 2018.

By the authority vested in the Community College of Vermont by the Board of Trustees of the Vermont State Colleges, I confer upon you, the class of 2018, the Associate Degree.

Will the graduates from Bennington please stand and come to this end of the stage

I ask that graduates from all other centers stay seated until they are invited to come forward by ushers.

Now, graduates, if you would please direct your attention to the front of the main aisle.

Trevor, please lead your class in moving their tassels.

Once again, congratulations to the class of 2018. We are very proud of you. We send you off with newly conferred degrees, trusting that you will continue to work together to strengthen every community you belong to.

The group on the platform will lead the graduates out. I ask the audience to remain seated until the graduates have completed their recessional. Thank you.