

EDUCATION

HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CLASS OF 2018

Holyoke Community College Celebrates Class of 2018

HOLYOKE, MA — College is like a roller coaster ride, professor Alex Sanchez told the Holyoke Community College Class of 2018 — full of excitement, anticipation and anxiety, ups, downs, twists and turns, but, in the end, well worth the trip.

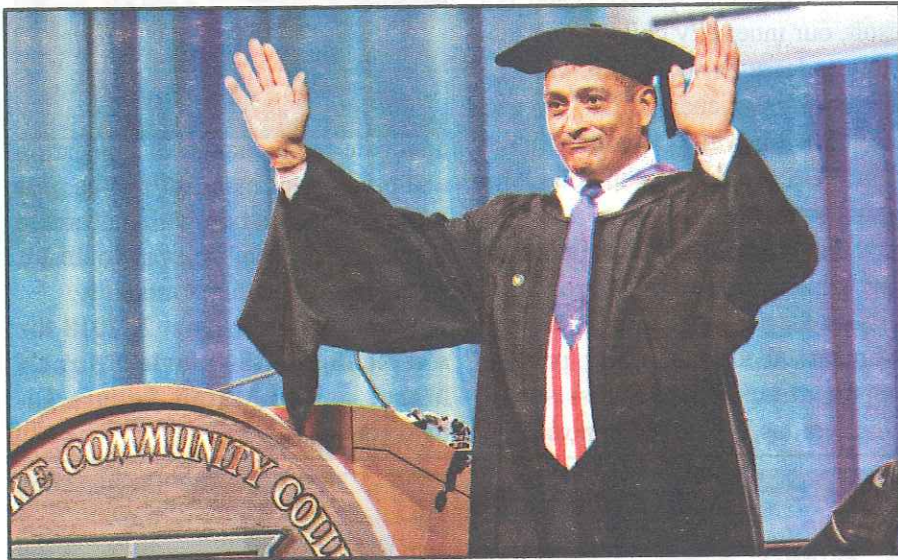
“You’ve reached the final stretch of this amazing ride and you tell yourself, ‘This wasn’t so bad.’ Some of you will say, ‘That was awesome,’ while

and 17 different countries on four continents.

“Some of you wanted to create a better life for yourselves and your families,” HCC president Christina Royal told the graduates. “For others, this journey has been about preparing for a new career, and, maybe for others, it’s about setting an example for your children about the importance of education and lifelong learning.”

“I remember my first semester at HCC. I wanted to give up,” she said. “I didn’t even know how to write an essay, and now here I am, reading one to you at graduation.”

Liberal arts major Nicholas Parenteau, a Holyoke native who now lives in San Leandro, Calif., performed an original spoken word piece titled “153 Years of At-Risk Youth.” Chicopee resi-



Faculty speaker and Holyoke native Alex Sanchez, sporting a tie designed like a Puerto Rican flag.



Student orator Jaritza Rosario of Holyoke, a member of the HCC graduating class of 2018.

others will say, ‘I’m glad it’s over,’ said Sanchez, the faculty speaker at the college’s 71st Commencement, held June 2 at the MassMutual Center in Springfield. “I can assure you that everything in life will have its ups and downs, fast speeds and slow ones, but you know that this is part of life, and things will get better.”

Sanchez, a Holyoke native who now lives in Southwick and is an HCC alumnus from the Class of 1990, advised the graduates to challenge themselves as they move on with their lives.

“Don’t be afraid to take another leap of faith, as you have done with your education and careers,” he said. “Work hard. ... Remember that you did this and you can challenge yourselves and take another roller coaster ride.”

HCC celebrated 903 new graduates, awarding 787 associate degrees and 140 certificates in more than 80 different academic programs. Graduates ranged in age from 17 to 70, and hailed from 71 different Massachusetts cities and towns, nine states from as far away as California and Florida

“Whatever your reason may be,” she said, “you had the courage to begin, or begin anew. You had the determination to persist and persevere through all the challenges that life has thrown at you in this journey. You had the curiosity to make new friends and explore new interests. You had the humility to ask for help when you needed it. And you had the mindset to start what you finished. And this is what an HCC graduate looks like.”

In her Commencement address, student speaker Jaritza Rosario of Holyoke talked about how she had dropped out of middle school and was motivated to get her high school equivalency and then study business at HCC to help her run her start-up jewelry company, Florr.

“I had the passion to succeed but not the skills,” said Rosario. “I remember reading that 80 percent of businesses fail within the first three years because of lack of knowledge. I said to myself, ‘Well, I’m going to college to get some knowledge, because I’m not failing.’”

She did that and graduated with her associate degree in business administration.

dent Brittany Berta, a music major and jazz singer, sang “A Moment Like This” by Kelly Clarkson.

Also speaking were state Rep. Aaron Vega of Holyoke, whose daughter, Courtney Joaquin, graduated with her associate degree, and Katy Abel, associate commissioner of the Mass. Dept. of Higher Education. ■