

## President Jukoski's Commencement Speech

Congratulations to the class of 2021! You will always be remembered as the Covid-19 class when you talk about your graduation from Three Rivers in the days and years to come.

Your lives are going to be marked by the pandemic in the same way that previous generations experienced Pearl Harbor, World War II, The Vietnam War, 9-11, and the insurrection on the capital on January 6, 2021 along with some recent national events revealing some ugly and disconcerting inequities in American society.

Graduates of the class of 2021, I recognize that this is not the graduation ceremony you dreamed about with family and friends cheering you as you walked across the stage. For many of you, you are the first in your family to earn a college degree. The entire Three Rivers community is honored to celebrate the over 430 graduates we are honoring today who are coming from all walks of life, each with your own unique story. Let me share with you some stories about our graduates that we are celebrating today.

Svetlana Kasem-Beg is a single mom who works full time for a beverage distributor and has 3 children, 2 in college right now, and one that just graduated. She attended Three Rivers and UConn some years ago but wasn't able to finish, and now is graduating from Three Rivers with AS General Studies with a 4.00 GPA. Svetlana applied to Conn College to move on to get her BA/BS degree. What a great example of how a person can jump back in after years away from school and still "juggle" school, work, and family. Congratulations Svetlana.

Grace Carlos is graduating with a Liberal Arts & Sciences degree. Another really involved student who participated in many student clubs and activities, she interned at the Governor's office last semester and organized community gatherings for her town. Grace is graduating but will return to Three Rivers to complete the CSCU Political Science transfer degree in the fall. Congratulations Grace.

Erin Collins shared that, "I had issues for 26 years of my life -- getting into trouble, being addicted to drugs, going to prison accomplish something after I got clean. I never thought I would ever receive a college degree. I want to work in this field so I can help people who went through the same thing or are going through the same thing that I went through!" Erin is graduating with an Associate degree in Human Services. Congratulations Erin.

David Medina, who is graduating with an AS in General Studies shared that, "As a child, I was told I would never amount to anything, to put it nicely. As a teenager, I thought college was not an option. While in the military, I wondered if I could go to college. When I got out of the military, I put my children first. I started college when I was 25 years old, part-time, some years full-time with breaks in between. Losing credits due to moving out of state and changing my major. Finally, 27 years later with my wife's encouragement, I earned my degree. My greatest supporter: my lovely wife, Vanessa Medina, who didn't let me quit every time I wanted to. Congratulations David, and we wish you continued success.

We have students from the Three Rivers Middle College who are earning an Associate Degree while just completing high school: Summer E. Beebe, Mary M. Malloy, Collin Aleksak --- CSCU - Math Transfer, Ra'anaa J. Clarke, Hailey Dubois, Hanna Clarice Hollenbeck – General Studies, and Joshua Lawrence Oswald.

We also recognize graduating students who realize learning never ends: Nelson Ramirez, History Studies, 64 years old; and Herb Horner, Criminal Justice Enforcement, 76 years old.

Today, I speak to all our graduates and say, this is your day to celebrate your commitment to achieve your goal of earning an associate degree. As a class you have shown resilience and strength to complete your courses when the year was disrupted by the pandemic. You faced the challenge of remote learning with perseverance and an unwavering resolve so that you could make your graduation today a reality.

Your graduation is an invitation to use your education to begin to heal the afflictions of society by applying the best of what you have learned in your head and felt in your heart.

As a class, you have the power to stand for healthier conditions that will create a healthier society. we all have the responsibility to keep the global community healthy by keeping ourselves healthy in mind, body and spirit.

My hope for you is that you will use your talents to harness your energy, your education, your creativity, your voice and your vote---to create more equity, more justice, and more joy in the world. May you be the class that blazes a new way forward and commences a new beginning for living, loving, and being responsible stewards of this planet, Earth, which is our home.