

CLASS OF 2017 Suffolk County Community College

Astronaut: 'Follow your passion'

Suffolk County Community College held its 55th commencement yesterday in the Health, Sports and Education Center on the Michael J. Grant campus in Brentwood.

Number of graduates

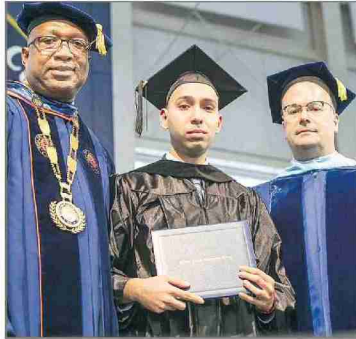
4,174 total degrees awarded.

Commencement speaker

Space Shuttle Commander Robert "Hoot" Gibson spoke about his career as a fighter pilot and astronaut, attributing his success to the teachings of his father and the associate degree in engineering science he received from SCCC in 1966. "You are all going to find, just as I did, that the education that you received was excellent preparation," he said. "I never would have dared to dream that I would get to go to space... Follow your dreams, follow your passion."

Student speakers

Samantha Reeves, 26, of Bay Shore, who earned an associate degree in communications, could not hold back tears as she spoke of her mother, who died from cancer before she could see her daughter graduate. "A few days before she passed, she made me promise her that I would finish school regardless of how many limits life had to offer," she said.



Aymer Callejas, with SCCC president Shaun L. McKay, left, and executive dean James Keane, accepts a posthumous diploma for brother Kevin.

Lucia Mallozzi, of Ronkonkoma, who earned an associate degree in geological and earth sciences, spoke of the challenges she faced early in her studies. "It was a hard decision to return to Suffolk, but in hindsight it was the best decision I ever made. Because of Suffolk County Community College, I did not become a statistic." — CHRISTOPHER CAMERON

Joan Bolanos-Martinez, 32, business administration

Venezuela, right now, is having hard times. I want to help to rebuild my country. All the opportunities that I'm getting here in Suffolk, I owe this to my country."



Victor Piccini-Ventura, 23, liberal arts

It feels like I've made an impact for myself. And I hope to make an impact on others."



Anthony Valcourt, 22, business administration

I want to go back to my country in Haiti. My goal is to create a better opportunity for kids in need, to be able to have a better future just like I did."



Sumayah Uddin, 22, liberal arts

I didn't really want to leave Suffolk. This really became my second home. I was really shy before I came here, and now I have a bunch of friends. It kind of feels weird to uproot myself all over again."

