

# 800 receive degrees at MCC's 53rd commencement

By Joe Cooper

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MANCHESTER — As a student returning to higher education, Blenda Frances Church said she discovered how to balance the many twists life brings.

As valedictorian of Manchester Community College's Class of 2017, Church said several career changes — she's been a legal assistant, human resources officer, and fitness instructor — led her to the podium Thursday.

The 30-year-old Tolland native, who already has a bachelor's degree, urged her classmates at MCC's 53rd commencement to seize opportunities and never shy from the moment.

"I have learned that it is from these backwards and sideways movements that we gain our strength," she said. "What we have achieved is remarkable, and we need to always remember what it took to finish our degrees."

Church, a graduate of Tolland High School, began at MCC in fall 2014 and was admitted into the school's radiation therapy program in 2015.

She recently secured work at Hartford Hospital, where she said she aspires to lead the radiation department.

The salutatorian, Anthony Rosati of Vernon, earned a degree in business administration and plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in human resources management.

A graduate of Palmer High School in Massachusetts, Rosati is a member of the school's international business honor society, Alpha Beta Gamma.

Church and Rosati were among five graduates to receive the Board of Regents Medallions for Academic Excellence for earning a perfect 4.0 grade-point average. Kirsten Delzell of Colchester, Molly Gosselin of East Hartford, and Raymond Russell of Norwalk also received the honors.

Commencement was held in MCC's SBM Charitable Foundation auditorium after rain forced the ceremony indoors.

A small number of graduates and spectators viewed the ceremony from overflow rooms nearby through a live broadcast.



## getting ready

Janice Mahoney of Windsor, left, helps classmate Renisha Martin of Windsor Locks, right, with her mortarboard before the Manchester Community College fifty-third commencement exercises on Thursday May 25, 2017. Family and friends gathered to honor their graduates as they received their degrees.

Michael Jordan-Reilly, MCC's director of public relations, said the circumstances were not ideal but the forecast left the school with few options.

Still, MCC President Gena Glickman awarded 840 degrees and certificates to 800 graduates representing 93 towns in Connecticut and eight other states.

A total of 128 graduated cum laude, 68 magna cum laude, and 37 summa cum laude.

The Class of 2017's youngest student is 18 years old and the oldest is 75. The class also included 37 military veterans.

Among the graduates is Stephanie Delgado, who received the President's Student Award. Delgado earned her associate's in criminal justice and served as president of the Criminal Justice Club — all while undergoing nine brain surgeries over the last decade.

The East Hartford native continued her studies despite her physical ailments and working to support her children.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., told the 800 graduates they inspire him to fight for tuition-free public education.

Blumenthal reminded the graduates to remember the preciousness of life and "to never wait to have fun."

Commencement speaker Joelle Murchison, the associate vice president and chief diversity officer at the University of Connecticut, said earning a college degree propels students into a better future.

Murchison, an East Hartford native, encouraged the graduates to maximize their academic accomplishments toward a future with endless potential.

"The many different paths that led you to this day are what makes you strong — and it's that shared experience that will keep you connected," she said. "Not to be cliché but today is indeed the first day of the rest of your life."