



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Perseverance a Theme at KVCC Commencement**

AUGUSTA—A total of 477 students graduated from Kennebec Valley Community College (KVCC) this spring, with approximately 280 participating in the College's 46th commencement exercises Saturday, May 21, at the Augusta Civic Center.

"Today you are proof that perseverance makes anything possible," keynote speaker and four-term Maine state representative Henry Beck told graduates, many of whom balanced school with work, parenthood, and other demands in order to reach graduation.

In his speech to graduates and the hundreds gathered to celebrate them, Beck emphasized the importance of higher education in both obtaining and keeping quality jobs.

"Your hard work at KVCC—the fact that you stuck it out and saw it through—has given you the best assurance for a good life and a great future," Beck said. "What is more, our towns, our hospitals, and our schools are strengthened and secured because you bring to them your hard work, knowledge, and skill. Today you are better able to add value to the mid-Maine economy and the quality of life that we hold so dear."

The commencement ceremony celebrated many firsts, including the first cohorts to graduate from the culinary arts associate degree program and the welding certificate program. Sixty-nine percent of graduates were the first in their families to earn a degree.

"The graduates from our new programs are always a deep source of pride as they represent the welcome growth of fresh skills for our regional economy and new forms of opportunity," said KVCC President Richard Hopper.

Four graduates and an alumnus were honored with awards during the ceremony.

Student commencement speaker Erin Falconer, a mental health major, was selected as KVCC's 2016 Student of the Year, receiving the John H. Lapoint, Jr. Leadership Award for academic success, campus and community service, and the ability to achieve dreams in the face of personal challenges. A nontraditional student and single parent, Falconer earned a spot on the Dean's List each semester and induction into the Phi Theta Kappa honor society. She also volunteered at the High Hopes Club House in Waterville and served on the board of directors for Crisis and Counseling.

“Erin exudes the concept of resilience that we teach about in the Mental Health Program,” faculty Mark Kavanaugh and Wendy St. Pierre said in a joint statement. “Erin has had many hardships in her life when she could have just given up. . . . We see Erin as a person who will provide a voice for those who have yet to find their voices.”

Ashley Emery, a nursing major from Waterville, received the Aaron Levine Outstanding Student Award for citizenship and active involvement in campus and community projects. Emery was instrumental in raising resources for local nonprofits including Hope’s Place and the Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter, and she served as president of the Future Nurses Association. She has accepted a position on the maternal-child unit at Maine General Medical Center.

Tatsiana “Tanya” Fields, an occupational therapy assistant major from Etna, received the Fred Whitney Award, given to a student who, through sacrifice, perseverance, and determination, has demonstrated scholastic achievement and the ability to overcome personal obstacles. After immigrating to the United States from Belarus, Fields taught herself to speak English and in 2010 earned her U.S. citizenship. She is interviewing with top healthcare facilities for an occupational therapy assistant job.

Lauren Webb, a physical therapist assistant major from Canaan, received the Bernard King Award, presented to a degree-seeking student with the highest GPA at graduation. Webb has accepted a position as a graduate physical therapy assistant and is considering continuing her education to earn her doctor of physical therapy degree.

Churchill Elangwe, a 2006 graduate of the electrical technology program, received the Distinguished Alumni Award. Elangwe is a quality assurance engineer at Wunderlich-Malec, an engineering firm in Winslow. He has influenced the evolution of the firm’s quality assurance unit, starting from his time as an intern at the company while a KVCC student. He subsequently earned a bachelor’s degree from Rochester Institute of Technology in upstate New York, and he is a member of several professional organizations and an avid volunteer.

Ranked among America’s best two-year colleges, Kennebec Valley Community College offers more than 35 programs and is the best value in higher education. The College has invested nearly \$25 million over the past three years, opening a new campus, upgrading infrastructure, expanding program offerings, and ensuring the highest-quality instruction. More than 94 percent of KVCC graduates find jobs in their field or continue to a four-year college or university. KVCC provides an affordable and practical path to success with small class sizes, excellent support services, and flexible scheduling. KVCC has the lowest tuition in New England, yet most students receive generous financial aid packages to cover the cost of tuition and fees.