



**News release**

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**Be a tree – serve others, be strong  
and be yourself, keynote tells Gateway grads**

Wednesday's Gateway Technical College commencement keynote speaker Je'Leslie Taylor told graduates that they and the lives they lead are like trees.

Each life is led by its own set of purposes, desires and individual ways of processing. But she told them that, like a tree, they had three separate components – the root, the trunk and the crown.

"The roots of the tree are anchored in love," Taylor said. "Tree roots grow deep and wide. They connect and intertwine with other roots. Trees begin to anchor one another and hold one another up. The roots of your tree are your family and loved ones, especially those before you that have paved the way for you to be here today.

"When talking about the roots of your tree, never forget where you came from, who helped you get where you are now and who you are at your core. Always stay true to who you are."

Taylor, who serves as the warden at the Racine Youthful Offender Correctional Facility, told students they are also the trunk of the tree.

“You are the trunk,” she said. “The trunk, the middle part of the tree moving upward. You are moving on up. You are moving into your careers and you must be true to yourself. Walk in your gifts and purpose.

“Choose yourself. Be authentically yourself – for you. Don’t compare yourself to others or try to be like anyone else. You are your own tree.”

Finally, Taylor told graduates they are the crown of a tree.

“Your crown, the branches and leaves of a tree, are what everyone sees,” she said. “What will your crown look like? Who will be impacted by your crown? Who will your crown serve? Servant leadership is about taking care of others. All of you have earned a degree that in some way or fashion will help you serve others in your lives and careers.”

Taylor, who has worked for the state of Wisconsin for more than 30 years, also serves as the interim warden at the Racine Correctional Institution – the second-largest facility in Wisconsin – and the Sturtevant Transitional Facility.

Wednesday’s ceremony honored the School of Health, the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the School of Protective and Human Services, and it was one of two held by the college this week to recognize an estimated 1,382 graduates from the Summer 2023, Fall 2023, Spring 2024 and Summer 2024 semesters who will complete their program. About 550 graduates will participate in the two ceremonies.

The college already held its first commencement, Tuesday, for the School of Business and Transportation and the School of Manufacturing, Engineering and Information Technology.

Student Responder Ashlyn Rozhon told the audience that the college has provided a solid education for students to succeed in their future careers.

“Gateway has provided us invaluable opportunities, including class projects, internships, clinical rotations, study abroad trips and service opportunities – offering us real-world experiences and practical skills,” said Rozhon.

Rozhon earned a Gateway Associate of Applied Science Physical Therapist Assistant degree and was named a Gateway Global Scholar and a Gateway Service Scholar.

A solid education isn’t all the college has provided students, Rozhon added.

“While Gateway has equipped us with a comprehensive education, it has also given us the gift of lifelong friendships, friendships with those who were once strangers in a classroom and staff members we once called on for guidance.”

The college honored 2024 Gateway Technical College Alumni Association Distinguished Alumni Tony Gonzalez at the ceremony. Gonzalez graduated from Gateway’s Law Enforcement Academy in 2008. He currently is a captain with the Kenosha County Police Department. He earned a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice, as well as a master’s degree in organizational leadership and administration from Concordia University-Wisconsin.

Archived videos of the ceremonies will be available in the next few days on Gateway’s website at [www.gtc.edu/commencement-ceremonies](http://www.gtc.edu/commencement-ceremonies).

Gateway Technical College’s mission is to deliver industry-focused education that is flexible, accessible and affordable for our diverse community. The college collaborates with communities in Kenosha, Racine and Walworth counties to ensure economic growth and viability by providing education, training, leadership and technological resources to meet the changing needs of students, employers and communities.

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