



News release

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**Gateway holds second of two commencements
to honor graduates**

For Gateway Technical College Criminal Justice graduate Sherry Cannon, this week's commencements were a family affair.

Cannon took part in Wednesday night's event and says her daughter was in the crowd to cheer her on. This wasn't the first time Cannon was here this week – because she attended her daughter's Gateway graduation ceremony the night before.

Cannon said at first, she was unsure whether she would participate in the School of Health, School of Liberal Arts and Sciences and School of Protective and Human Services commencement ceremony Wednesday night. The thought of all the hard work she did to earn the degree, though, and the satisfaction of celebrating that accomplishment brought her out to attend.

"We are all here tonight for the same reason," said Cannon. "This is important. Our education is important, and it's important to celebrate and walk across that stage to get our degree."

Cannon was one of an estimated total of 1,300 Gateway graduates from the Summer 2022, Fall 2022, Spring 2023 and Summer 2023 semesters honored this week. About 450 graduates participated in the two ceremonies.

The college held another ceremony on Tuesday, May 16, for the School of Business and Transportation and School of Manufacturing, Engineering and Information Technology.

Wednesday's commencement keynote speaker, Lisa Just, told graduates the careers they enter will make a difference in someone's life. They are in-demand and trained workers are greatly needed.

"Each of the programs (tonight) are focused on caring for our community," said Just. "I believe each of us has chosen one of these programs – ready-made careers that are in demand – but that this type of work puts us in a place to make a difference in the lives of the people we touch.

"Gateway has provided you with the specialty training needed to be competent, but the difference you will make rests in the kindness, the compassion, the empathy and the instinct to protect that you will add to your competence. It takes a special person to serve in these roles and I am so glad you chose to do so."

Just told graduates to engage in their careers and, even though they might be new in the career, they should still "use your voice" to express their thoughts.

"Pull your seat right up to the edge of the table and lead from your chair to make positive, affirming change in your personal life, at work and in your

community,” said Just. “Don’t wait for permission, an invitation or a title. Get involved, make a difference.”

Just currently serves as president of the Aurora Health Care South Wisconsin Area, including as president of Aurora Medical Center at Mount Pleasant and overseeing Aurora Medical Center Burlington, Aurora Lakeland Medical Center and the Aurora Medical Group clinics in Racine, Kenosha and Lake County, Ill.

Student Responder Jamie Hawkins told the audience it was the words of a Horticulture instructor and the memory of a quote that became the catalyst for her to enroll at Gateway.

“I remembered one of my favorite quotes: ‘To plant a seed is to believe in tomorrow,’” said Hawkins. “Little did either of us know that, in that fateful moment, she planted the seed for my future.”

Hawkins, who earned a Greenhouse Operations associate degree, said that while each graduate may have enrolled at the college at a different point in their life and career, all have one similarity.

“The one thing that brought us all together is our drive to find our true passion,” said Hawkins. “It might not have been what you originally set out to do at the beginning of your educational journey ... but through Gateway you found your true passion within.”

The college honored 2023 Gateway Technical College Alumni Association Distinguished Alumni Debra Hain at the ceremony. Hain earned her Gateway Practical Nursing technical diploma in 1980 and her Nursing associate degree in

1985. She went on to earn her doctor of Nursing Science degree, a PhD in Nursing and, in 2022, a postgraduate degree as a psychiatric nurse practitioner. In total, she's earned eight degrees. She serves as a tenured professor, doctor of Nursing Practice program and graduate co-coordinator for the Adult/Gerontological Nurse Practitioner program at Florida Atlantic University.

Other commencement notes:

- The first students to earn a Liberal Arts associate degree were honored at the ceremony: Ava Allred, Kendal Christensen, Gabrielle Deanparvar, Nicole Oberlin and Jorge Perez. Gateway first gained the authority to offer the degrees in October 2021.
- Norma Christina Nava became the first Gateway student to receive the DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurses for her exceptional patient care at her clinicals. Nava earned her associate degree in Nursing.
- The archived ceremonies will be available in the next few days on Gateway's website at 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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