



News release

August 22, 2020

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**Gateway holds in-person candlelight,
nurse pinning ceremony for 2020 graduates**

At a time when the coronavirus shut down nearly all in-person college and high school commencement and graduation celebrations, it may have opened the door for a historic ceremony to return at Gateway Technical College.

Gateway held a mixed drive-through, in-person nurse pinning ceremony Friday for its Spring 2020 and Summer 2020 graduates on its Kenosha Campus. Students could bring family members to the event to celebrate with them, take photos and hear speeches – all the components of a traditional graduation event.

It had a 2020 twist to it, though, with the requirement of face masks, social distancing and holding the event outdoors to provide a safer way to honor the graduates during the current pandemic. Holding it outdoors also allowed the college to put on the traditional candlelight ceremony of the Blessing of the Hands – an event which can not be held typically because of fire safety concerns for indoor events.

“Now more than ever it is important to acknowledge the accomplishments of, and support, our new nurses as they transition into a challenging workforce,” said Vicki Hulback, Gateway Technical College dean of the School of Health. “In

celebration of Florence Nightingale, we have chosen to add a candlelight ceremony to signify the passing on of knowledge from the faculty to the students and celebrate Florence, who cared for soldiers room-to-room by lamp light during the Crimean War.

“Our students have persevered through one of the most rigorous programs, they have sacrificed and really stepped up to stay engaged and continue their studies during the pandemic. We are proud of them.”

About 40 graduates attended, many accompanied by the two carload maximum of family and friends who could also attend the event. Graduates' names were announced, their family accompanied them to the stage where they were pinned and then they went to a photo area where an official graduate photo was taken. They then returned to their cars or parking lot, where everyone could hear the celebration through a special FM station on their vehicle radio or through the event loudspeakers.

“The year 2020 — ironically the year of the nurse — will surely go down as one of the most memorable years in modern history,” said graduate Erin Miller, one of two graduate keynote speakers. “When we started this journey, we had no way of knowing we would finish during a pandemic. When we started this path, we had no way of knowing that society would need nurses now more than ever before.”

Miller said those who've graduated this year have had to adapt and overcome, which they can use as a strength moving forward in their career.

“We are a unique graduating class in that we trained during a pandemic and had to adjust on the fly,” Miller told her fellow graduates. “Our ability to begin again or change directions and our ability to keep going and overcome obstacles sets us apart.”

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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