

## Stockton University Doctoral and Master's Graduates Urged: 'Never Stop Learning'

Elaine Bukowski, Professor of Physical Therapy, Speaks at Commencement

***For Immediate Release; with photos on [flickr](#); graduate list***

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**Galloway, N.J.** - Graduates at Stockton University's Doctoral and Master's Commencement today were urged to "never stop learning," and to "be the change in your world," by speaker Elaine Bukowski, a professor of Physical Therapy who has taught at Stockton for the past 29 years, including serving as director of the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program, the university's first doctoral program.

Bukowski, who also has worked in a variety of settings in the United States and West Africa, including inpatient rehabilitation, oncology, nursing home, home care and outpatient physical therapy, told the graduates she was initially discouraged from applying to college.

"I remember being told early on in high school, 'take secretarial classes because you will never make it to college,'" she said. "I did not let that stop me. Here I am, many years and three degrees later. Remember: Set your goals high...and know that you can reach them, just like you have reached today's goal with your graduation."

Bukowski spoke to over 170 graduates, their families and friends in the Sports Center on the main Galloway campus, at the first of Stockton's three graduation ceremonies this spring. Baccalaureate commencements will be held on Sunday at 9:30 a.m. and 3 p.m. A total of about 1,500 graduates are expected to participate in the ceremonies, as members of the largest graduating class in Stockton's history.

Bukowski, who is also a practicing clinician providing pro bono services, talked about treating an orthopedic outpatient whose wife called later that day to say how much better he felt. She quoted Maya Angelou who said; "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

"The Stockton you entered is not the Stockton you are leaving," Bukowski continued. "Like the **-more-**

***-continued from page 1-***

Stockton that has changed, as you apply the knowledge you have gained over these past few years you will create changes in people's lives, meaningful changes that make all the difference to them. This is the responsibility that comes with your degree. No matter how big or small the change, hopefully the people with whom you engage will remember how you made them feel.

"The world you live in today is very different from the world into which you were born," she continued. "All of your fields have witnessed many advances. Use them for the good of the people you serve. Never be afraid to try new things and look at your world in a new way."

Bukowski was awarded Stockton's Distinguished Service Award and professor emerita status by Trustee Raymond Ciccone during the ceremony. The award was "in recognition of Dr. Bukowski's outstanding leadership as a founding member of Stockton's Physical Therapy program and her enduring commitment to the health care industry," Ciccone said.

This year marks Stockton's fifth Spring Doctoral and Master's Commencement ceremony. Stockton currently has 14 graduate degree programs, serving over 800 students. The growing graduate program awarded its first degrees in 1999 with a Master's in Business Studies, and the first doctoral program, in Physical Therapy, was approved in 2006.

President Harvey Kesselman noted in his welcoming remarks that he is a member of Stockton's inaugural class and said, "Throughout our history, Stockton has remained committed to its mission of excellence in teaching, reinforced by support for scholarship and dedication to service.

"Although our footprint has changed over the past 47 years, our guarantee to students has been steadfast. Stockton has always been a place where students can plant themselves and grow," Kesselman continued. "Those familiar with Stockton's history know this as our first motto, an invitation to intellectual and personal growth, pointing to our rich, natural environment.

"Our transformation from a small state college to a growing regional university signifies our deep dedication to providing a distinctive educational experience at the baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral levels and reflects Stockton's evolution into a premier institution of higher learning," he said.

"Candidates, your Stockton education equips you to succeed in your workplaces, personal lives, further education, and in your communities," Kesselman continued. "Through academic and co-curricular engagement we have nurtured your ability to communicate, collaborate, and to be innovative, all critical skills in the 21st century."

He told the graduates: "We have asked a lot of you over your years at Stockton and you have risen to each level of challenge. I will make one more request today – change your world! Do this by the way you build communities, raise families, support social justice, and educate others and by being kind. You are our best hope for a meaningful future in a world filled with innovation, imagination and optimism."

Dr. Alexander Onopchenko, who has been a practicing general surgeon in Atlantic County since 1989, was the student speaker. He is one of 17 graduates who earned their Master's of Business Administration in an MBA program tailored to AtlantiCare, a first of its kind here.

"As I began my MBA in 2014, people often asked me, 'Why would a general surgeon with 25  
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***-continued from page 2-***

years of experience bother with such an endeavor,” said Onopchenko. “Certainly, in the middle of each semester, especially in the summer, I repeatedly asked myself the same question. Was I planning a career change? Was I looking for advancement in position? Was I simply crazy to do this at my age? Perhaps the answer was “D,” all of the above.....”

But he went on to say: “Our world, our professions, our lives become more complex by the minute and constant learning is the answer in order to evolve and not become extinct. This is clearly exemplified by our alma mater as well, since during our two years here, Stockton has evolved from a college to a university and from simply an MBA program in a business school to one accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.”

Onopchenko concluded by saying: “If we wish to evolve and not become extinct, we realize that learning must never end. We all look back fondly on our time at Stockton and hope for a future harvest of benefit from our hard work. But today we appreciate being here with all of you and celebrating this moment of the present. Thank you.”

Zachary Abbott, who graduated from Stockton in 2013, surprised Nicole Henry with a marriage proposal after she received her M.S. in Communication Disorders degree. Abbott, 27, is a teacher at Pinelands Regional High School, while Henry, 25, is a speech pathologist at Care One in Holmdel, N.J. (She said yes.)

Interim Provost and Executive Vice President Susan Davenport presented the candidates to the president for conferral of their degrees and explained the tradition of hooding. “As the graduates come to the stage, they will be hooded, a tradition that dates back to medieval times,” she said. “The hood’s size and color indicates the level of the degree, the institution that conferred the degree, and the field of study in which the degree was granted.”

The university awarded a posthumous degree to the family of George Lees of Smithville, who died in April before he could receive his Master of Science in Computational Science degree.

“In the words of one classmate, George will be remembered by his friends and classmates at Stockton for the attentiveness he showed others, by his willingness to drop everything and help anyone in need,” said Kesselman. “His enthusiasm for the challenge of education was contagious. He was persistent in trying to solve the impossible. His passion for knowledge, physics, and astronomy was transparent and motivating.... As we continue on we will forever feel him by our side, pushing us and believing in each one of us with his enthusiastic words ringing in our heads, when he would often say, ‘You got this, you really do.’”

Lees’ mother, Karen Coffey, sister Brianna LeFaucheur, son Aidan and fiancée Helene Maxwell, accepted his hood, diploma and program distinction certificate, followed by a moment of silence to honor his memory.

The commencement procession was led by Grand Marshal Jennifer Barr, professor of Business Studies, Marketing.

Joseph Sramaty, a 2015 alumnus who now works in the Office of Student Affairs, led the singing of the national anthem and the alma mater, “Ospreys on Parade.” The alma mater was written by Professor Emeritus of Creative Writing and 2001 Pulitzer Prize winner for poetry Stephen Dunn. The music was composed by Bud Noble, an adjunct faculty member. The lyrics were adapted by Sramaty and Noble.

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Patti McGill Peterson, presidential advisor for Global Initiatives at the American Council on Education (ACE), will be the keynote speaker at both the 9:30 a.m. and 3 p.m. Baccalaureate ceremonies on Sunday. Peterson oversees work on the internationalization and global engagement of higher education for ACE, the major coordinating association for higher education institutions in the United States.

She is also president emerita at Wells College and St. Lawrence University, where she held presidencies from 1980 to 1996.

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