



GREG KWASNIK

Class Marshal Alex Lamontagne leads graduates yesterday during Manchester Community College's commencement exercises.

Diverse group graduates from Manchester Community College

◆ **173 men and women:** About half are the first in their families to go to college and nearly all held jobs while studying.

By **GREG KWASNIK**

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GOFFSTOWN — At college commencement ceremonies everywhere, the gown and mortar board are symbolic nods to the early days of higher education, when scholars of the middle ages wore their robes and hoods to distinguish themselves from the rest of the population.

For the 173 men and women who graduated from Manchester Community College yesterday, the cap and gown were also a symbol of how much higher education — and society — has changed.

In contrast to the cloistered universities yore, last night's graduates were a diverse group of mothers, fathers, veterans

and other learners who had obtained their associate degrees while holding down jobs and raising families.

In his address to the graduates, MCC President Ronald Rioux marveled at the group's diversity. By turns he asked students to stand up if they were the first member of their families to go to college. Roughly half of the students got out of their chairs.

When Rioux asked students if they had held a full or part-time job while attending school, nearly all of the graduates stood up.

"The diversity of this year's graduating class represents the very best of MCC," Rioux said, speaking to students from the Sullivan Arena at Saint Anselm College.

For many students, like Leslie Reven, graduation came at the end of an untraditional road. Reven, who earned degrees in management and accounting, took eight years to finish — all while working.

"I actually really did it just to prove to my daughter it could be done," Reven said. "She was still in high school when I started."

Other students, like Burim Grajcevci, are making new lives for themselves after immigrating to America. Grajcevci, a native of Kosovo, earned his associate degree in business management.

"I am overly excited," said Grajcevci, who plans to pursue a higher degree. "I mean I've been attending community college for over four years and I'm finally at the end of it. It's exciting."

In a speech to his fellow graduates, Student Senate President J.J. Morro praised his classmates for having the perseverance to

make their dreams happen.

"I've seen with my own-vision the power of persistence," Morro said. "Students, working hard, working full time going to school, trying to help their families achieve a better way of life, individuals fighting, never giving up."

Robert Duhaime, a member of the Board of Trustees of the Community College System of New Hampshire, also gave credit to the graduates' willingness to take on the roles of community members, colleagues, parents and scholars.

"Persistence, enthusiasm and determination have brought you graduates here this evening. As you are well aware and have all experienced, there were times when it wasn't easy, when the demands were overbearing," Duhaime said. "You've not only earned your degree, but you've earned the respect of your peers and the pride of your family and friends."