

FITCHBURG STATE

'Overcoming adversity,' and achieving dreams



COURTESY OF FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

More than 500 Fitchburg State University undergraduate students concluded their college careers with their commencement ceremony on

Rain can't douse commencement joy

By Cameron Morsberger
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FITCHBURG » More than 500 undergraduates students at Fitchburg State University turned the tassel Saturday, marking the end to their college careers and the start of their post-graduate life.

Though the occasion was marked by some rain, which began to fall during the conferring of degrees, the cheers and applause persisted. Hundreds of loved ones crowded around their graduates at the university's main quadrangle, holding balloons and flowers, taking photos and breaking out all the bells and whistles — literally.

Fitchburg State University President Richard Lapidus captured that excitement in his address to the Class of 2023. After congratulating graduates on their hard work and encouraging them to continue learning outside the classroom, Lapidus acknowledged their families who helped them get there.

"As you reflect back on your experiences as a student, I'm sure that you didn't arrive here today on your own," Lapidus said. "There were many people who shared your ups and downs along the way. It might

have been a special professor who led you through a tough patch or helped you nurture a good idea, or the sacrifices that your parents, family, spouse or partner made so that you could walk across the stage today."

Life is about more than grades and academics, Lapidus said, but about one's outlook on life. He shared an encounter he had with a homeless woman at North Station in Boston, whose positivity and friendly demeanor surprised him. Optimism, Lapidus said, "gives you permission to hope during the negative times."

A negative moment or stressful situation is only temporary, Lapidus stressed, making your own perspective all the more important.

"The reality of life is that there's always going to be contradiction and tension," Lapidus said, "but how you frame it and moderate it will be critical to better understanding yourself and allow you to become your best."

FSU 1991 alum John Honeycutt, a former media and entertainment executive turned industry consultant, returned as the commencement speaker this year — his first actual FSU commencement, as he actually had missed his own. The



CAMERON MORSBERGER — LOWELL SUN

Soon-to-be Fitchburg State University graduates descend on the main quadrangle during their commencement ceremony May 20, 2023. Fitchburg Mayor Stephen DiNatale, FSU President Richard Lapidus, commencement speaker John Honeycutt and Valedictorian Kenneth Aubuchon delivered remarks during the commencement.



COURTESY OF FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Fitchburg State University President Richard Lapidus offered his reflections to a graduating class of more than 500.

Graduation

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world has changed since he arrived on campus in 1987, Honeycutt bemused. He had started school with a typewriter, but his classmate brought with him an Apple MacIntosh, which became Honeycutt's introduction to a decades-long career in media and digital communications.

Having found success in taking risks, Honeycutt advised the new alumni to invest in themselves, embrace the uncomfortable and "find what feels good," all of which he learned himself, in time.

"Your time here in Fitchburg and the events of the last few years have influenced, shaped and changed you," Honeycutt said. "Your time here has provided you with the opportunity to expand your education, grow your ambition and set new goals. Be assured that you now have the knowledge, training and skills to define your own path and reach those new goals."

Valedictorian Kenneth Aubuchon served as a testament to that commitment to perseverance. Aubuchon characterized the graduating class's journey to graduation as "a jagged road," and spoke on his family's own struggles caring for his younger brother, who is losing his independence due to health complications.

He thanked the school's financial services and "kind-hearted professors" who supported him along the way, as well as his mother for her care and his father, "who is my biggest role model and is the very

type of person that I desire to be when I get older."

"Going through tough times gave me the motivation to pursue my goal of being top in the class," Aubuchon said. "In addition to friends and family, I believe that the faith I held about being able to accomplish anything I want to and actually accomplishing my goal showed me that you can achieve anything if you put your best foot forward. You can really achieve something despite the hardships when you set your mind to it and give your best effort."

Benjamin Sacramone, an exercise and sports science

graduate, received the Robert V. and Jeanne S. Antonucci Student Leadership Award for his work as orientation leader, achievements as a student athlete and "positive personality" at student pep rallies.

Sacramone and his fellow classmates proceeded to the stage to officially cap off their time at FSU.

Lily Bolton, of Upton, who graduated with a degree in interdisciplinary studies, reflected fondly on her years at FSU. As president of her sorority, Sigma Sigma Sigma, Bolton said she had "a lot of fun." Holding her degree cover, surrounded by family, Bolton

said she was "very happy" to graduate.

"I'm actually working full-time at Baypath Humane Society, which is the animal shelter in Hopkinton, Massachusetts," Bolton said, "so very excited to start doing that. I've been a volunteer there for a while."

The rain drove some families to leave the proceedings early, but graduate Aaron Lehner, of Salem, N.H., stayed, looking out across a sea of new alumni taking photos. Lehner graduated summa cum laude with a degree in communications media, with plans to possibly become a freelance video editor.

Despite the challenges imposed by the pandemic, Lehner said he enjoyed his time at FSU.

"I think the rain is a bit of a symbol. My friend was saying that when it rains

on big events like this, it's a sign of good luck," Lehner said. "Most of us, I think, started during COVID anyway, so it ties into a theme of overcoming adversity and that we'll be just fine."

Sentinel & Enterprise

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FITCHBURG STATE

Alumni to give commencement address

University announces honorees for 127th commencement exercises

By Matthew Bruun
Fitchburg State University

FITCHBURG » As undergraduate students celebrate their academic achievement at Fitchburg State University on Saturday, May 20, it will be an alumni imparting wisdom upon them.

Monday, the university announced John Honeycutt, a 1991 graduate of the institution and

media and information technology pioneer, will be delivering the commencement address. In addition, Honeycutt will be awarded the President's Medal at the ceremony, recognizing him for his career which includes senior leadership roles at Fox, Discovery, Google and an Emmy award.

"We are honored to welcome John Honeycutt back to campus to share his experience and

insights with our graduates and guests," FSU President Richard Lapidus said in a press release. "His global media and technology career exemplifies the importance of adapting to continuous change while performing at the highest level."

FSU said Honeycutt has been at the forefront of innovation in the media industry over the past

ALUMNI » PAGE 8



John Honeycutt, a 1991 graduate of Fitchburg State, will deliver the undergraduate

COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Alumni

FROM PAGE 1

30 years. In 2019, he and his teams' contributions were recognized with a Technology and Engineering Emmy Award from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for advances in the utilization of cloud technology in the global media industry.

But everyone had to start somewhere.

For Honeycutt, his start was as a member of his high school newspaper The Mustang News in Medford. In 2020, he founded Sandy Valley Media, a consulting firm that advises sports leagues, media companies and investors in a disrupted media landscape.

While at Google, Honeycutt served as vice president for Google Cloud's Media & Entertainment, Telecommunications and Gaming business, where he established and implemented GCP's ini-

tial product and go-to market strategy globally.

Prior, Honeycutt spent 15 years driving innovation and transformation at Discovery Communications, culminating his tenure as chief technology officer.

In London, Honeycutt served as chief operating officer for Discovery Networks International where he drove Discovery's global expansion into new territories and new platforms.

He began his career at Liberty Media and NewsCorp

working to establish Fox Cable Networks, Fox Sports, and National Geographic Channel as category leaders.

Honeycutt serves as chair of the International Broadcasting Convention Council, is a non-executive director at Blackbird PLC, an adjunct professor at The American University's Kogod School of Business and a charter member of AU's Cybersecurity Executive Advisory Council, a member of The Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers and a volunteer at Harbor Homes of Martha's Vineyard Homeless Shelter.

Other commencement honorees include Stephanie Tsacogianis of Stoneham, who will speak as recipient of the Graduate Student Lead-

ership Award at the graduate ceremony on May 18. Tsacogianis is completing an MBA with a concentration in healthcare management.

The undergraduate ceremony will also include remarks by valedictorian Kenneth Aubuchon of Leominster, who is completing a bachelor's degree in business administration.

The undergraduate ceremony will be held at 10 a.m. on Saturday, May 20, on the main quadrangle of campus. Master's degrees and certificates of advanced graduate study will be bestowed at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 18 in the Athletics and Recreation Center at 130 North St.

For more information, visit fitchburgstate.edu/commencement.



COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Stephanie Tsacogianis of Stoneham will speak as recipient of the Graduate Student Leadership Award at Fitchburg State University's graduate ceremony on Thursday, May 18. Tsacogianis is completing an MBA with a concentration in healthcare management.



COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Kenneth Aubuchon of Leominster will speak as the valedictorian during Fitchburg State University's undergraduate commencement on Saturday, May 20.

NEH awards Fitchburg State \$500K for downtown theater project



IMAGE | COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Fitchburg State University plans to build a new 250-seat black box theater in Downtown Fitchburg.



By Timothy Doyle

Fitchburg State University received \$500,000 from a National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grant to support the construction of a 250-seat black box theater adjacent to a historic theater in downtown Fitchburg.

"We are grateful to the NEH for supporting this public-private partnership that will be transformative for our students while enhancing the quality of life in the city and region," FSU President Richard Lapidus said in a Tuesday press release. "This theater space will create singular learning opportunities for students, provide a state of the art resource for community groups, and drive the continuing revitalization of downtown Fitchburg."

The black box theater construction is the second phase of the redevelopment of a vacant theater at 717 Main St. In the first phase, the university built a studio for students studying game design and an ideaLab to support local businesses.

The restoration of a 1,700-seat proscenium theater will be the final piece of the project.

The challenge grants offer 1:1 matching funds to organizations for capital projects. Ten percent of the award can be used for fundraising costs, according to the NEH website.

The university [received \\$2 million](#) for the project as part of the \$1.7-trillion omnibus spending bill passed in December.

The project is a key piece in the revitalization of downtown Fitchburg. The city is partly [banking on cultural institutions](#) to help bring its downtown back to life. The city has an historical connection with arts and culture.

"At the turn of the century, this was a railroad hub. There were hotels and over a dozen theaters. It was something people did back then: stay at one of the hotels and go see a show," local historian and gallery owner Peter Capodagli told WBJ in October.

3 hours ago

Fitchburg, Worcester facilities among 11 awardees of \$1.3M in cultural grants



RENDERING | COURTESY OF FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Fitchburg State University's theaterLAB was among 11 Central Mass. cultural projects to receive funding from Mass. Cultural Council.



By [Timothy Doyle](#)



Fitchburg State University, Creative Hub Worcester, and Southborough Historical Society were among the largest recipients of \$7.6 million in Cultural Facilities Fund grants statewide from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.



“Massachusetts is fortunate to be home to many museums, theaters, and other arts and culture-based destinations,” MassDevelopment President and CEO Dan Rivera said in a Tuesday press release from MCC. “These institutions are core to our economy – driving tourism, creating jobs, and educating and inspiring countless visitors. MassDevelopment is proud to administer this fund together with the Mass Cultural Council.”



The CFF provides capital and planning grants to nonprofit organizations, colleges, and municipalities that own or operate facilities primarily focused on the arts, humanities, and sciences. CFF awards invest in the acquisition, design, repair, renovation, expansion, and construction of nonprofit and municipal cultural facilities.

FITCHBURG STATE

WELCOMING THE FUTURE FLOCK



COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Fitchburg State tour guides and Freddy the Falcon welcomed prospective students at Future Falcon Day. For more photos of the event, see page A8.

Future Falcon Days soar at local university

Staff Report

FITCHBURG » Hundreds of prospective students and guests were welcomed for the first of this season's Future Falcon Day events on Saturday, March 18, at Fitchburg State University.

The day's program included campus tours, program-specific information sessions and a reception in the Athletics and Recreation Center where admitted students and guests visited with university students, faculty, staff and administrators to learn more about life at Fitchburg State.

Fitchburg State's Office of Admissions held another Future Falcon Day on Saturday. The university offers a number of additional visit opportunities, from general tours to specific information sessions geared toward accepted students who are still making their academic decisions. For more information, visit fitchburgstate.edu/visit.



COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Visitors to Fitchburg State's Future Falcon Day on March 18 enjoyed food and giveaways. The event, for students accepted to enroll this fall, drew hundreds of guests.

FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

FUTURE FALCONS



Above, representatives from Fitchburg State’s student clubs and organizations were on hand to meet with prospective students and guests at Future Falcon Day on Saturday, March 18.

At right, Freddy the Falcon was on hand to welcome future Fitchburg State students and their guests.

Below, at Fitchburg State’s Future Falcon Day, student-athletes welcomed prospective teammates and enjoyed refreshments.



PHOTOS COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY



FITCHBURG STATE

Partnership to expand mental health care access

Staff Report

FITCHBURG » Students at Fitchburg State University who need mental health services now have another resource available.

On Tuesday, Christie Campus Health said it had partnered with the university to offer students access to a 24/7 clinical support line, telehealth appointments, virtual psychiatric prescribing and a custom online wellness help. The tools are available to Fitchburg State's over 6,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

In a press release, Robert Hynes, Fitchburg State's director of Counseling Services said he believes the additional services will prove valuable and supplement the care students already receive.

"Christie Campus Health's platform of services will most certainly supplement, as well as address important gaps in, the mental health services that the University has traditionally offered," Hynes said. "We're eager for our campus community to take advantage of these services, as we continue to make efforts to address the significant increase in demand for care."

"We are looking forward to partnering with Fitchburg State University and assisting them in expanding their counseling resources to students," added Christie Campus Health's Chief Clinical Officer Kaitlin



Gallo, Ph.D. "The 24/7 Clinical Support Line, telehealth options, in-person therapy, virtual psychiatric prescribing clinics and Wellness Hub of mental health information and resources will give students many additional ways to seek help without worrying about stigma or judgement."

The 24/7 clinical support line provides in-the-moment support to students anytime, anywhere. In-person and telehealth

care will expand the capacity of existing campus mental health resources by providing students with access to the largest national network of domestic and international licensed mental health providers, Christie Campus Health said.

The provider added virtual psychiatric prescribing will bring students access to psychiatric services that are often challenging to find in a student's local community or through

their insurance network. The wellness hub is a user friendly online and mobile resource that provides students with educational content on a range of behavioral health and substance use issues along with online tools. All services are free to students, reducing well-documented barriers to care, especially for students for whom care has been cost-prohibitive.

Christie Campus Health also said the demand for mental health services

is rising and demand is outpacing the capacity at many counseling centers, not just at Fitchburg State. The company's program is tailored to support students as well as campus counseling professionals by expanding and complementing on-campus mental health services. The program is managed by a highly experienced service team that partners with school counseling centers and other student services to maintain a seamless ex-

perience for students that ensures consistent communication, education, and tracking.

The company does not just provide services to Fitchburg State, instead it has partnered with over 100 colleges and universities to support over 70,000 students nationally and internationally. Fitchburg State is the tenth state university to partner with Christie Campus Health

For more information visit christiecampus.com.

FITCHBURG STATE

'Sweet SixQueen' to benefit student scholarships

Annual drag show returns March 30

By Shane Rhodes

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FITCHBURG » The "largest and oldest" drag show in New England is returning to Fitchburg State University on Thursday, March 30.

Presented by the Gay Straight Alliance at FSU, the "Sweet SixQueen" is the 16th annual drag show, with proceeds benefiting the university's LGBTQ Student Scholarship. The show will start at 7 p.m. at FSU's Athletics and Recreation Center.

In a press release, FSU said 11 different performers will bring dancing and cabaret-style performances to the stage. Performers include: Leominster's own Lady Sabrina, Mizery, Karisma, Ivy League, Abby Cummings, Destiny, G Licious G, Victoria Obvious, Nikita LaFemme and Anita Cocktail; the Fitchburg State Performance team are also expected to make an appearance, performing their dance number, "Unholy."

Raquel Blake will act as the "Mistress of Ceremonies," according to the press release, with DJ



DANIELLE RAY — SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE

"Mistress of Ceremonies" Raquel Blake at "The Gayest Showman," the 15th annual benefit drag show performance hosted by the Gay Straight Alliance at Fitchburg State University on Thursday, March 31, 2022. Blake is set to resume their role during the GSA's 16th benefit, "Sweet SixQueen," on Thursday, March 30, 2023.

Scotty P also set to perform. The highly anticipated Drag Race, with students from the university, will also crown a Drag Queen and a Drag King.

Performance proceeds will benefit FSU's LGBTQ Student Scholarship.

FSU Associate Director of Student Development Shane Franzen, who has supervised the performance since its inception, stressed the importance of the show to the local LGBTQ+ community. He also said the GSA has worked "tirelessly" on the per-

formance and called it a "privilege" and an "honor" to serve as their advisor and watch them "grow and flourish" within that community.

"With all that is happening in the world regarding anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric, this Drag Show is an important part of the fabric of LGBTQ+ life at Fitchburg State and her surrounding communities," Franzen said in the press release. "It shows that Fitchburg State does not discriminate based on sexual orientation, color, race, or

identity."

"It solidifies the openness of the faculty, staff, community, but most importantly, the students. With the changing climate of the country, it is now more important than ever to show off our culture."

The event is meant for audiences aged 18 and over. Tickets are \$5 for students or \$10 for the public and can be purchased at the information desk in Hammond Hall, 160 Pearl St., or online at bit.ly/42t1Dx6.

FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

'DRAG IS NOT A CRIME!'



DANIELLE RAY — SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE

Ivy League channeled a 1950s pinup for her performance at the 16th annual Fitchburg State University Drag Show on March 30, dubbed Sweet SixQueen.

Sweet SixQueen drag show imparts clear message

By Danielle Ray

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FITCHBURG » Beneath all the sequins, feathers, fabulous hair, makeup and talented performances, a deeper message echoed through Fitchburg State University's Athletics and Recreation Center.

"Drag is not a crime! We're not here to groom your chil-

dren, we'll allow them to have bad hair," quipped Mistress of Ceremonies Raquel Blake at the 16th annual FSU Drag Show, which drew loud applause from the 1,000-plus crowd gathered for the festivities.

The March 30 event, dubbed Sweet SixQueen, is the largest drag show in New England. Proceeds will benefit the school's Gay-Straight Alliance LGBTQ+ scholarship fund, an active group of dozens of students led by longtime advisor and FSU Associate Director, Student Development Shane Franzen.

Franzen, aka Muther Divine, came out in a hot pink gown

dripping in jewels to welcome everyone to the show. He introduced the 11 "fantastic, superb, professional queens" from all across New England and the country that strutted their stuff on stage and did lip-sync performances for the excited audience throughout the evening.

"We are here we are queer," said GSA President and FSU junior Allison Turner before the performance kicked off. "No homophobic politicians are going to stop us. Stop homophobia and transphobia in its tracks."

The FSU Performance Dance Team treated attendees to a sultry number to the Kim Petras

and Sam Smith hit, "Unholy," while Raquel led the first drag performances decked out in a chartreuse sparkling ensemble to Taylor Dayne's rendition of the classic "Can't Get Enough of Your Love."

"It's actually number 18 but COVID got us all," the Mistress of Ceremonies said of the annual show that started in 2004. "I'm still (expletive) here every year because you know what? Drag is not a crime."

Several audience members raised their hands when she asked the crowd if anyone was celebrating a birthday or spe-

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Drag

FROM PAGE 1

cial occasion: A couple announced that they had just gotten engaged, drawing cheers and sentiments of congratulations; members of the Mount Wachusett Community College Gay Club announced that the show was their "first outing."

Raquel brought former GSA President Adam Stone, who graduated from FSU in 2019, up on stage when he told her that she inspired his name.

"I got an email from you and it just sort of clicked. That's how I got my name," Stone shared. "I've been transitioning since 2018, it's the best thing that's ever happened to me."

Blake joked that the next entertainer, "the iconic Mizery," had "been doing drag for 1,000 years, starting with the dinosaurs." Lady Sabrina, also known as Miss Leominster, was next up in a magenta sequined onesie as FSU students busily gathered up tips and discarded clothing.

After some more electric performances, Blake brought the Drag Queen and Drag King contestants up on stage, several FSU students who were vying for a crown and bragging rights. After they went backstage to do their own hair and makeup, G Licious G walked the runway up to the stage in a money print

bodycon suit and gold cape.

Raquel, who had undergone one of several costume changes and was now wearing a form-fitting floral dress, said G Licious G, her longtime roommate in Dallas and "one of my best friends in the entire world," has been doing drag for over 25 years. Ivy League came out next, channeling a 1950s pinup and in between impressive scat singing lip syncing engaged willing audience members in staring contests.

Abby Cummings' performance began with audio of several news clips announcing Tennessee banning drag shows in public places before she ramped up the crowd with a charged performance to Christina Aguilera's "Fighter."

"And we will fight and we will fight and we will fight! With love," Raquel proclaimed before urging people to "call out racism, call out homophobia."

"The world is a (expletive) dumpster fire and the time for playing nice is kind of over."

Anita Cocktail followed with a moving performance to Pat Benatar's "We Belong."

"We belong to the light, we belong to the thunder. We belong to the sound of the words we've both fallen under. Whatever we deny or embrace for worse or for better, We belong, we belong, we belong together," she sang as the audience held up their phone flashlights and swayed back and forth.



DANIELLE RAY — SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE

Mistress of Ceremonies Raquel Blake had an important message to convey at the 16th annual Fitchburg State University Drag Show on March 30 — "Drag is not a crime!"

The spectators enjoyed interacting with the stars of the show, which also included Destiny, Karisma, Nikita LaFemme and Victoria Obvious, as they sang along and danced in their seats. NoWoCo Pride was on hand as well as the FSU Alumni Association while there was cotton candy, pink frosted cupcakes and assorted snacks and drinks as well as light-up necklaces and rings available for purchase.

When the two Drag Queen contestants appeared back onstage Raquel joked "I take it back, drag is a crime" upon seeing their outfits and joked about them looking like "two old ladies in Boca Raton."

"Take your Metamucil ladies, it's gonna be a bumpy ride," she said to raucous laughter.

Next, the Drag Kings pranced around to "Gangnam Style" before a Queen and King were crowned.

Muther Divine sent out a letter to LGBTQ+ students, faculty, staff and allies prior to the show that began with "Hello Poodle, I wanted to take a moment to give you a bit of encouragement and love."

"We are a few short months into what is supposed to be a new year. But everytime you turn on the news, there is another Anti-LGBTQ+ Bill that is being proposed or is being

passed," the letter stated. "You have a home and a family here at Fitchburg State. A home that does everything in our power to create a safe and welcoming environment for you to express yourself and for you to be you. A home that does not condone these types of derogatory and harmful actions."

"You are Safe! You are Loved! You are You and no one can take that away! Trans, Gay, Fluid, Queer, Queen, King, Ally. You are surrounded by family, friends, colleagues, teammates, faculty, staff, and administration who care for you and who will do everything in their power to

protect you and help you succeed."

Franzen said they are working their way toward the GSA LGBTQ+ scholarship fund being endowed; they have approximately \$10,000 to go until they reach the \$25,000 needed to award scholarships. He said he hoped proceeds from this show would add \$5,000 to the fund once everything was tallied.

"Each year we hope to reach the endowed goal, however, as expenses rise it takes a little longer since we have to cover costs for the show first," Franzen said. "Our hope is 'one more show,' so we will strive to have April 4, 2024, be the show that will endow."

Franzen said the GSA Executive Board "has done such a wonderful job of creating a sense of belonging for the students" and that it is incredibly important to him and the university as a whole to continue to provide a welcoming space for LGBTQ+ and allies at the school through the club, which meets every Thursday at 3:30 p.m. and supports students with "a wide range of services for you if you are feeling the pressure if the day is getting to you, or if you need a place to talk and unwind," according to the letter he penned as Muther Divine.

"No Matter what the world throws at us, we are loved, we are here and we are everywhere. Never forget that! We Stand in Solidarity, Muther Divine."



EDUCATION
Students
to share
experiences
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FITCHBURG STATE



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Fitchburg State students are pictured in the 'Heart of Europe' during the spring 2023 journey.

Students to share experiences in 'The Heart of Europe'

Presentation on May 3 focuses on history, economy

By Matthew Bruun
Fitchburg State University

FITCHBURG » Students and staff from Fitchburg State University who traveled on the "Heart of Europe" journey this spring will share their experiences and lessons learned about contemporary international relations in an open discussion at 7 p.m. Wednesday, May 3.

The presentation will be held in the Miller Oval in Miller Hall, 230 Highland Ave. Admission is free and open to the campus community and wider public.

"Teaching our students

in my Europe Today course about recent European history and powerful international events unfolding in the heart of Europe provides them not only with the wonderful educational preparation to visit The Netherlands, Germany, and Poland, but also transformative experiences influencing their lives and careers," Joshua Spero, an international relations professor in the university's Economics, History and Political Science Department.

In early April, "Heart of Europe" students shared their trip's experiences

and its impact on their lives as part of the Forbush Memorial Library in Westminster's "Great Decisions Series," an important opportunity to talk with the community about the challenges for a rapidly changing Europe and their thoughts regarding the US-transatlantic relationship and Europe's future.

Spero has taught the Heart of Europe course for several years, and the voyage planned for 2025 will mark its sixth iteration. Students in the course examine major themes in contemporary European his-

tory, politics and economics before traveling to see some of the most significant places in the world, now planned for the end of the university's Spring semester, and also engage with students and faculty at partner institutions in Germany and Poland. The university offers scholarship support to help students cover travel costs.

Learn more about Fitchburg State's faculty-led study abroad programs at fitchburgstate.edu/academics/undergraduate-academics/study-abroad/faculty-led-study-abroad-programs.



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FITCHBURG STATE

A perfect complement, cheese and wine

'Made in Italy' series to conclude April 27

By Matthew Bruun

Fitchburg State University

FITCHBURG » The Center for Italian Culture at Fitchburg State University will conclude its “Made in Italy” programming series on April 27 with an expert-guided tasting of Italian cheese and wines.

Fred Plotkin, a world-renowned expert on opera and everything relating to Italy, will serve as a virtual guide to this in-person evening dedicated to the special pleasures of Italian

cheese and wine. Plotkin is the author of seven books on Italian food culture, including the brand-new Italy for Food Lovers that he co-wrote with travel guru Rick Steves. For his services to spreading Italian culture worldwide, Plotkin was made a Cavaliere (the Italian equivalent of a knighthood) in 2015 by the president of Italy.

The program will be held at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, April 27 in the main lounge at Hammond Hall, 160 Pearl St. Tickets are \$50

and may be purchased online at fitchburgstate.edu/made-in-italy.

Participants in this event will be able to taste and learn about five extraordinary Italian cheeses:

Fresh calabro ricotta: This elemental, versatile, beguiling cheese is the crucial ingredient at many Italian breakfasts as well as in pasta cookery and desserts.

Pecorino toscano: The timeless flavor of this ancient sheep’s milk cheese — beloved in Tuscany and Central Italy since the time

of the Etruscans — is by turns herbal and fruity, reflecting the food the ewes eat.

Taleggio: This luscious, creamy cheese from Lombardy is an exaltation of the milk produced by cows who graze in alpine valleys.

Parmigiano-reggiano: This magnificent King of Cheeses from Emilia-Romagna and a small pocket of Lombardy forms crystals that embed a complex nutty and sweet flavor, all the while providing huge amounts of protein in every bite

Gorgonzola dolce: A blue-veined cow’s milk that is,

by turns, sweet and sharp, comes from northern Italian caves. It pairs in dazzling ways with different fruits and nuts.

Throughout this academic year, the Center for Italian Culture has sponsored programs that explore the “Made in Italy” merchandise mark, one that was developed in the course of the 20th century to indicate that a product was completely designed, manufactured and packaged in Italy. It is one of the most well-recognized “brands” in the world.

The Made in Italy merchandise mark under-

scores the international uniqueness of Italian goods in four traditional industries: food, fashion, furniture, and mechanical engineering. Italian products in these fields and others have come to be associated with high quality, specialization, differentiation, and elegance, and carry strong links to famous Italian industrial districts and makers. They are often connected with the concept of luxury.

Read more about Plotkin’s talk, and learn about previous events in the series, at fitchburgstate.edu/made-in-italy.

Grantees must provide one-to-one matching funds for the awardees, according to the press release.

Central Massachusetts received 11 grants in the funding round, totalling \$1.3 million.

Fitchburg State University received \$200,000 toward construction of The theaterLAB, a 250-seat black box theater planned on Main Street. The project is part of a larger renovation of a section of Main Street containing a long-vacant proscenium theater the university plans to bring back to life.

Creative Hub Worcester received \$200,000 to transform the former Ionic Avenue Boys Club into a community-based arts space, offering artist studios, exhibition space, and child care.

“We want to create a space where community members can feel safe and supported as they explore the processes of art-making and collaboration and give a voice to communities and youth who may be silenced or marginalized,” Creative Hub Founders Laura Marotta and Stacy Lord said on the organization’s website.

The Southborough Historical Society received \$200,000 for the renovation of the Fayville Village Hall at 40-42 Central St., built in 1911, into a history and cultural center.

The American Heritage Museum in Hudson received \$200,000 for the renovation of its Vietnam War Gallery to include a new exhibit about prisoners of war.

The Fitchburg Art Museum received \$200,000 for a new HVAC system.

Groton Hill Music Center received \$152,000 for new lighting and video equipment.

The New Dawn Arts Center received \$107,000 for the purchase of the building in which it is located at 84 Main St. in Ashburnham.

Old Sturbridge Village received \$31,000 to spruce up its Bixby House.

The EcoTarium in Worcester received \$20,000 to perform a 20-year capital needs assessment.

The Stratton Players in Fitchburg received \$17,000 to advance renovation plans of its theater.

The Museum of Russian Icons in Clinton received \$12,500 to perform a 20-year capital needs assessment.