



EDUCATION
FSU announces
honorees for
commencement
ceremonies
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Sentinel & Enterprise

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FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

FSU announces honorees for commencement ceremonies

Submitted Article

FITCHBURG » The University will be welcoming back alumna Yla Eason, who founded a multiracial toy company dedicated to fighting the racial imbalance in toys and superheroes, to deliver the address at the undergraduate commencement ceremony on Saturday, May 18.

Eason, a 1971 graduate of Fitchburg State, is an accomplished marketing professional based in the Greater New York City area and currently serves

as an assistant professor of professional practice at the Rutgers University Business School in New Jersey, where her focus is business communications and marketing.

“Yla Eason’s inspirational story of activism and entrepreneurship sends a powerful message for the Class of 2024,” said Fitchburg State President Richard S. Lapidus. “We are honored to welcome her back to campus to continue our tradition of presenting accomplished alumni as our commencement speakers.”

Lapidus will also address graduates and guests at the ceremony, which will be his final commencement as president of Fitchburg State. He is retiring from his post in June.

Eason is the founder of Olmec Toys, which has reached over \$5 million in sales, and is nationally recognized for pioneering a new market in the toy industry while also promoting racial diversity. In addition to her Bachelor of Arts degree from Fitchburg State, Eason received an MBA from Harvard Busi-

ness School.

Eason will be presented the President’s Medal at the undergraduate ceremony.

Reinaldo “Rey” Lopez is the founder of Resource Management Inc., one of the nation’s largest Hispanic-owned businesses, will also be presented the President’s Medal at the undergraduate ceremony.

Born in Puerto Rico, he migrated to the mainland United States with his mother in 1962 and soon joined her working in the tobacco fields to help sup-

HONOREES » PAGE 5



COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Alumna and accomplished marketing professional Yla Eason will be the keynote speaker at the Fitchburg State University undergraduate commencement ceremony on May 18.

Honorees

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port the family. His mother’s tireless work ethic and commitment to family proved a solid foundation upon which Lopez would build for the rest of his career.

Honorees at the undergraduate ceremony will also include valedictorian Jyy Rose Liang of Lunenburg, majoring in educational studies.

Fitchburg State will hold its graduate commencement ceremony at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, May 16 at the Athletics and Recreation Center. That ceremony will include the presentation of the Graduate Student Leadership Award to Ali Raza, who is completing a master’s degree in computer science.

Additional information on the ceremony and honorees may be found at fitchburgstate.edu/commencement.

— *Fitchburg State University*

FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Finalists named in FSU presidential search

Submitted Article

FITCHBURG » Three finalists have been named for Fitchburg State University's next president. The candidates, selected in a nationwide search, will visit the university campus in the coming weeks to meet with campus constituencies including open forums with the general public.

The university's Board of Trustees will vote on the next presidential appointment and submit the name to the state Department of Higher Education for final approval.

The next president will succeed Dr. Richard S. Lapidus, Fitchburg State's 11th president, who has led the institution since 2015.

The finalists will each spend two days on campus meeting with students, faculty, staff and alumni, as well as open sessions for external constituents. The finalists, in order of their scheduled campus visits, are:

- Dr. Karim Ismaili, Executive Vice President and Provost at Bridgewater State University. The public forum for Dr. Ismaili will be at 2 p.m. Thursday, April 11 in Ellis White Lecture Hall in Hammond Hall.

- Dr. Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, Dean and Chief Administrative Officer at the University of Connecticut Hartford. The public forum for Dr. Over-



COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Fitchburg State University has decided on three finalists in the nationwide search to replace President Richard Lapidus, who is retiring at the end of the academic year. From left, Vice President of Operations & Advancement at Colorado State University Dr. Donna Souder Hodge, Dean and Chief Administrative Officer at the University of Connecticut Hartford Dr. Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, and Executive Vice President and Provost at Bridgewater State University Dr. Karim Ismaili.

myer-Velázquez will be at 1:45 p.m. Wednesday, April 17 in Ellis White Lecture Hall in Hammond Hall.

- Dr. Donna Souder Hodge, Vice President of Operations & Advancement at Colorado State University, Pueblo. The public forum for Dr. Souder Hodge will be at 2:15 p.m. Tuesday, April 23 in Ellis White Lecture Hall in Hammond Hall.

The national search was led by a committee appointed by the Board of Trustees earlier this year, chaired by Trustee Eric A. Gregoire, himself a 2011 graduate of the university. The search committee in-

cluded representation from the campus and community and worked with executive search firm WittKieffer to identify candidates for the post.

"The opportunity to lead Fitchburg State generated substantial interest and today I'm proud to report the recommended finalists each embody the characteristics required of our next president," Gregoire said. "These accomplished academic leaders come from diverse backgrounds and impressive experiences that distinguish themselves and with an understanding of our special role as a regional com-

prehensive university prepared to lead Fitchburg State to a dynamic and bright future. There are substantial opportunities and significant challenges the next president will contend with but they will be forging ahead with a campus and broader community energized by the opportunity to work together ensuring Fitchburg State will flourish for the benefit of our students present and future."

Additional information on the search may be found at fitchburgstate.edu/presidential-search.

-Fitchburg State University

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FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

FSU celebrating launch of Biotech Research Lab

Ribbon cutting on April 10

Submitted Article

FITCHBURG » The ribbon cutting for the new Biotechnology Research Laboratory at Fitchburg State University is scheduled for next week and, with it, the University is hosting a panel

discussion on the present and future of the life sciences in Massachusetts.

The ribbon cutting has been scheduled for Wednesday, April 10, 2 p.m. at the University's Antonucci Science Complex, with the panel discussion following at 3:15 p.m.

The biology and chemistry laboratory investments were made possible

by a \$750,000 grant from the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center.

The event will include poster presentations by undergraduate students who have engaged in research sponsored by the Moderna Charitable Foundation. The day's programs will conclude with a MassBioEd network-

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COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

The Fitchburg State University campus.

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FSU

FROM PAGE 1

ing event for undergraduate students and industry professionals.

All programs will be held in the University's Antonucci Science Complex at 333 North St.

"We are excited to celebrate the opening of this new laboratory space and to share the research performed by our undergraduate students," said University President Richard S. Lapidus. "These life-changing opportunities and resources were made possible by generous support from our partners, and we are thrilled to show them

the impact of their gifts."

The grant-funded laboratory equipment will serve all biology and chemistry students, as it will be incorporated into all aspects of the curriculum, from introductory core classes to upper-level electives and independent research. The modernized equipment will give faculty the ability to train students in some of the most sought-after biotechnology skills.

Students will also be better prepared for workplace experiences, including internships. In addition, the grant will also serve students taking the newly formed data analytics minor, allowing Fitchburg State to develop new coursework to diversify its offer-

ings and attract more students to this growing field.

The research grant, facilitated by the university's Biology and Chemistry Department, targets traditionally underserved populations to engage students in mentorship and high-impact practices as an undergraduate research community.

The program is designed to help students navigate a post-COVID higher education landscape by increasing the retention and graduation rates of traditionally underserved populations.

Receiving a stipend and academic credit, the student research fellows will work 10 hours per week, receiving one-on-one mentorship and instruction on

cutting-edge techniques in their fields of interest.

Participating students are paired with faculty mentors to conduct credit-bearing research. The students in the program are paid for all aspects of their work, including performing experiments in the lab, analyzing data, preparing for weekly presentations, and career development activities.

At the end of the Spring 2024 semester, the 12 students in the inaugural cohort will present their work at the university's annual Undergraduate Conference for Research and Creative Practice on April 18, as well as a statewide research conference.

— Fitchburg State University

NHL COMES TO FITCHBURG

Thornton tells his story at FSU

Former Bruins enforcer shares experiences at Weston Auditorium

By Nick Mallard

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FITCHBURG » There was a time not too terribly long ago that when Shawn Thornton dropped his gloves, it spelled trouble for someone wearing an opposing sweater.

With his mitts off Monday, what the former Boston Bruins enforcer brought to Fitchburg State University wasn't a physical altercation, but rather a candid and honest look into the mindset that drove Thornton through adversity and to success in the NHL.

Appearing at the school's Weston Auditorium, the Bruins

fan favorite served up his trademark humor, but intertwined it with moments of insight and vulnerability in his "Fighting My Way to the Top" talk.

Thornton spoke openly of the grind of his journey from AHL stalwart to two-time Stanley Cup champion with Fitchburg State hockey players Sam Rennick, Toivo Kramer and Trenton Skaggs moderating before an attentive audience.

"I wasn't the most skilled guy, but I always found a way," Thornton said.

A rugged forward, Thornton won a Stanley Cup with the Ana-

heim Ducks in 2007 before coming to Boston. His never-say-die attitude on the ice and his work ethic was a microcosm of the Bruins' philosophy in 2011 as Boston claimed its first Stanley Cup in nearly 40 years.

Playing on the fourth line with Daniel Paille and Gregory Campbell, the "Merlot Line" as it came to be known played valuable minutes in the Cup run, earning the trust of head coach Claude Julien and the admiration of hockey fans across New England.

It fulfilled a promise made to Thornton by Bruins president

THORNTON » PAGE 2



SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE / NICK MALLARD

Former Boston Bruins Shawn Thornton, right, speaks with Fitchburg State hockey players, from left, Trenton Skaggs, Sam Rennick and Toivo Kramer at Weston Auditorium on Monday.

Thornton

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Cam Neely prior to the winger signing a three-year deal in Boston.

"I had three or four offers (in free agency). ... (Neely) was like 'I know you have multiple options, but I've seen players like you come

through this town and the appreciation this town has for guys like you is really special.' It was the understatement of my career," said Thornton, who ended up spending seven years with the Bruins. "The way Boston fans came to embracing and supporting me in my career. ... It still amazes me."

The Oshawa, Ontario,

native finished his career as the only player to have played in 600 or more AHL contests before taking part in 700-plus NHL games. He admitted to thinking about hanging up the skates to pursue a career in law enforcement as he neared 30 and was still languishing in the AHL, but Thornton eventually caught a break

in Anaheim and stuck as a full-time NHL skater.

"It was always a dream of mine to play in the NHL, even if it wasn't a realistic one, to be honest" Thornton said. "It's not easy. It was miserable some days, not knowing if you're going to make it. My mindset was I don't want to go back to the steel mill. I was playing

at the second highest level in the world and enjoying my teammates and the lifestyle and everything about it. That's what kept me going."

The transition from NHL enforcer to a member of the front office presented new challenges to Thornton, now the chief revenue officer for the Florida Panthers. But as he did on the

ice, he embraced the grind and is doing all he can to be successful in his new position.

"You get out of it what you put into it. I won't be outworked," Thornton said. "I take a lot of pride in it. It's a completely different world, but I still work just as hard. ... I'm blessed, but I put a lot of work into it."

LIVE SHOWS

Fitchburg State presents absurdist short plays in April

Submitted Article

FITCHBURG » Two one-act plays that point out the bizarre, delightful and surreal nature of life will be presented as Fitchburg State University's spring theater productions in April.

The performances, collectively known as "Absurdist Alert!" will be held next week in the Wallace Theater for the Performing Arts in the McKay Complex at 67 Rindge Road. Admission is free and open to the public.

"The Zoo Story," written by Edward Albee and directed by Jo Nazro, is absurdist in mood and ex-

plores different themes of existentialism, isolation, loneliness, social disparity, and dehumanization in a materialistic American society. Scattered with suspense and provocative humor, the piece is a study of human behavior.

"A Game," written by Dennis E. Noble and directed by student Allison Thompson, is the story of three individuals who agree to participate in an experiment in which they are locked in a small room divided into three "equal" sections. Each section is given to one of the subjects and possesses a unique quality. Whenever the

lights turn on, they must complete their only given task: stating ownership of their land. With every flick of the light switch, the subjects fight over their land. As they descend to madness, they showcase how far people are willing to go to be better than those around them.

The plays will be performed at 7 p.m. Thursday, April 25 and Friday, April 26; 2 and 7 p.m. Saturday, April 27; and 2 p.m. Sunday, April 28.

"Absurdist Alert!" is presented by the Communications Media Department.

-Fitchburg State University



COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Fitchburg State University campus.

FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Renowned author Fred Plotkin guides tasting tour

Special dinner this coming Friday, April 12

By **Cheryl A. Cuddahy**
Correspondent

FITCHBURG » Author and connoisseur of fine food Fred Plotkin — well known to be a lover of all things Italian — is excited to guide a dinner and tasting tour of the scambio, the exchange of food between Italy and America, here in North Central Mass.

The special dinner event, hosted by Fitchburg State University's Center for Italian Culture, is being held at 5:30 p.m. Friday, April 12, in Hammond Hall, Fitchburg State University, 160 Pearl St. The program is presented as part of the center's yearlong series *Nuovo Mondo*, exploring a century of migrations to and from Italy.

Fred Plotkin, co-author of Rick Steves' "Italy for Food Lovers", will discuss how American corn made its way into Italian polenta and how a popular sandwich on the streets of Palermo turned into a classic of New Orleans.

Guests will savor classic food and wine pairings as they learn about the cross-cultural influences of food.

Plotkin has long been a Fitchburg State favorite, appearing in person and online to curate and lead appetizing and entertaining tasting tours of Italian regions and traditions.

He will be remote for this event but will be guiding the discussion and tasting in real-time.

"I'm looking forward to speaking to one of my favorite audiences at Fitchburg State to explore another way that Italy has changed the world for the better," said Plotkin. "The scambio (exchange) of food products with the Americas radically changed for the better the way Italians eat and, at the same time, improved what people eat elsewhere. The Fitchburg audience will get to sample some dishes that are the result of this exchange."

Tickets are \$55 — including the lecture, food, and paired wine — and may be purchased online at [fitchburgstate.edu/nuovo-mondo](https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/nuovo-mondo). Additional wine and beer will be available for purchase at the event.



COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Fred Plotkin, co-author of Rick Steves' "Italy for Food Lovers", will discuss how American corn made its way into Italian polenta and how a popular sandwich on the streets of Palermo turned into a classic of New Orleans.

FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

CHEERS TO ITALY!



COURTESY OF VIN IALENTI

Vin Ialenti, president of Fitchburg State University's Center for Italian Culture, is pictured with his wife, Sharon Ialenti, enjoying an Aperol Spritz in beautiful Portofino, Italy, where they visited this past October.

Learn how to become an Italian citizen at Fitchburg State

By Cheryl A. Cuddahy
Correspondent

FITCHBURG » The Center for Italian Culture at Fitchburg State University is serving what they see as a growing population of U.S. citizens looking to make their love for Italy official. Next, Tuesday, April 16, the University is offering a free online course at 6 p.m. called "Introduction to

Obtaining Italian Citizenship."

Vin Ialenti, president of the Center for Italian Culture, believes there is a strong movement of Italian Americans who are interested in being recognized as Italian citizens.

"We are fortunate that the United States allows its citizens to have dual citizenship without renouncing their US citizenship," he said.

The custom webinar program, hosted by genealogists and members of the Vermont Italian Cultural Association, Lisa DeNatale (President), Mark D'Ambrosi, and Jerry Carbone, is free and open to the public. Attendees are asked to register in advance at fitchburgstate.edu/nuovo-mondo

Ialenti adds that there are at least four Facebook sites that

deal with the questions and issues of how to be recognized as Italian Citizens.

"I received my dual citizenship in 2017," said Ialenti. "I have seen the presentation that the Vermont team is doing, and it will be a great start for folks thinking about if they can obtain their Italian citizenship. After viewing it, I thought how

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COURTESY OF VIN IALENTI

Vin Ialenti is checking out a map of Abruzzo, historically known as Abruzzi, is a region of Southern Italy, where his ancestors came from.

Italy

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helpful it would have been if I had this resource before I started my quest. I did this before the Facebook support sites existed, so today if you are interested in exploring the process, there are lots of places to go to for support.”

Last fall, the Center for Italian Culture sponsored a presentation with Rhonda McClure of the New England Historical Society that dealt with the quest of gathering information on your Italian ancestors, when and where they were born and immigrated to the United States.

Ialenti says this was a good preface for the April 16 webinar.

“There are various paths to gain access to dual citizenship,” Ialenti added. “The most common and perhaps simplest is through the Line of Sanguinity (Jure Sanguinis). In my case, my grandfather was an Italian citizen who came to the United

States in 1895 and did not become a U.S. citizen until 1935 long after when my father was born. Technically, my father was an Italian citizen, so when I was born, the citizenship was passed on to me. I had to provide detailed proof of my lineage to the Italian Consulate General in Boston who then sent the information packet on to Rome to get final approval. Once you are recognized you can apply for an Italian passport.”

The challenge, says Ialenti, is documenting birth certificates, naturalization papers, family records from Italy, marriage certificates, etc.

“Some people do all the research on their own, others hire agents in Italy to gather the data. Seeking the records in Italy is a good excuse for some to take a vacation there,” Ialenti said with a smile.

The April 16 webinar will also outline the other paths to citizenship and what they involve.

“It is a fascinating process with things changing all the time,” he said. For ex-

ample, a woman could not pass on her citizenship before 1948. I have to laugh that when I received my citizenship, I did not need to speak Italian or pass a cultural exam. Since then, if my wife wants to get her Italian citizenship through me, she now will have to pass a language exam.”

Ialenti says that people often ask him why he went through the effort of receiving dual citizenship.

“I did it primarily to honor my ancestors, and it gives me a great sense of pride,” he said. “Among the benefits of having an Italian passport is the ability to travel easily in European Union countries without visas, to have extended stays in the countries, and it can facilitate buying property and living in Italy.”

The Italian Citizenship webinar is virtual so there is no limit on the number of attendees.

“I hope to ‘see’ you at the presentation,” Ialenti said. “I am convinced that it will energize you and give you the tools to begin your dual citizen journey.”



COURTESY OF VIN IALENTI

Pictured are members of the Risio family, in 1914, in Quincy. Immigrants may be able to give their descendants the gift of Italian citizenship.

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 » MORE AT [FACEBOOK.COM/SENTINELANDENTERPRISE](https://facebook.com/sentinelandenterprise) AND [TWITTER.COM/SENTANDENT](https://twitter.com/sentandent)

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FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

FSU to feature guest trumpeter Jay Daly

By **Cheryl A. Cuddahy**
Correspondent

FITCHBURG » The Concert Band and Community Orchestra at Fitchburg State University will present a free concert featuring guest trumpeter Jay Daly at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, April 25, in Weston Auditorium, 353 North St. Admission is free and open to the public.

“It’s widely known that

Jay Daly is one of the premier trumpeters in the Northeast,” said Peter Mansfield, orchestrator and arranger with the Boston Pops Orchestra. “His virtuosity is matched by his stylistic versatility and he’s a consummate professional.”

The concert will showcase Daly in a 12-minute featured medley consisting of popular music tunes from the 20th century that

feature the trumpet as a solo instrument. Music from the Great American Songbook and chart-toppers of the 20th century will be featured.

“If you’re a fan of Louis Armstrong, Hoagy Carmichael, Herb Alpert, Chuck Mangione, the Beatles, or Maynard Ferguson you’ll be in heaven,” said Assistant Professor Amy McGlothlin, who leads the Concert Band. “And if

you’ve never experienced this music you are guaranteed a heart-touching experience that will leave you wanting more.”

The Fitchburg State Community Orchestra is composed of students, faculty members, and other musicians who live in the Greater Fitchburg community. The orchestra performs at numerous campus and community events.

The Concert Band is

open to all people with experience playing a band instrument. Its members include students, alumni, faculty and surrounding community members. The band performs twice per semester in Weston Auditorium. Anyone from any major is welcome.

To learn more about Fitchburg State’s instrumental and choral programs, please visit fitchburgstate.edu/music.



COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

On Thursday, a concert at Fitchburg State University will showcase trumpeter Jay Daly in a 12-minute featured medley consisting of popular music tunes from the 20th century that feature the trumpet as a solo instrument.

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FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

FSU welcomes Grammy-winning jazz drummer Neal Smith

Submitted Article

FITCHBURG » The Twin Cities high school jazz bands, along with Fitchburg State University's Fitchbyrds, will be putting on a free performance that will feature Grammy-winning jazz drummer Neal Smith.

The concert will be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday, May 1, at Kent Recital Hall in the Conlon Fine Arts Building, 367 North St. Admission is free and the community is welcomed.

Smith will also be giving a mas-

ter class for university and high school students the afternoon of the performance.

Assistant Professor Amy McGlothlin of the university's Humanities Department leads the Fitchbyrds Modern Jazz Band and organized the visit.

"We are excited to present this masterclass and concert with such an amazing guest artist," McGlothlin said. "We hope to make this an annual event."

The Fitchbyrds Modern Jazz Band includes Thomas Adler-Mandile, Ronan Cords, Jack

Dancause, Rala Diakite, Joshua Leaffer, Joshua Lancaster, and director Amy McGlothlin. The Leominster High School Jazz Band is led by Robert Bergeron, and the Fitchburg High School Jazz Band is led by Nat Blankenship.

The event is a collaboration between Fitchburg State's music program and the Fitchburg Cultural Council, Mass Cultural Council, El Toro Promotions, and Fitchburg High School and Leominster High School.

— *Fitchburg State University*



The free concert is scheduled for 7 p.m. Wednesday, May 1, at Kent Recital Hall in the Conlon Fine Arts Building, 367 North St., Fitchburg. Grammy-winning jazz drummer Neal Smith.

COURTESY OF NEIL SMITH