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Downtown revival from vision to reality

Theater Block 'ideaLab' soon to open, one of several Fitchburg projects in works

By Amanda Burke

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FITCHBURG — Residents will begin to see the fruits of investment near Main Street next month.

A collaborative space known as the "ideaLab" will open to students and non-students alike on the second floor of the Theater Block, Fitchburg State University President Richard Lapidus told a crowd that included investors and

community development officials at the university Thursday.

"The second floor will open sometime in August. it's completely built out. The idea is to create a space where our students, our faculty, people from the community, can share the space, think about projects (and) try to incubate them," said Lapidus.

The NewVue Communities community development organization will have

a space at the Theater Block to offer assistance to prospective small business owners, said Lapidus.

The North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce offers "micro loans" to for riskier projects banks are disinclined to finance, he said.

"We're hoping that the synergy, creating a one-stop shop, if you will, will be attractive to the city and a benefit to

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“This kind of work is not about instant gratification. It really takes time, hard work and a little bit of luck.”

Eric Rosengren, chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank in Boston, pointing out that Fitchburg was one of four Bay State cities selected to participate in the first round of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston’s Working Cities Challenge

Project by project, a downtown transformation

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students as well,” he said.

The Theater Block renovation is one of four downtown projects that ReImagine North of Main Co-director and Montachusett Opportunity Council Vice President Patricia Pistone said are either underway or in the “pipeline.”

Our vision “is to ReImagine this neighborhood as a neighborhood of choice, where people want to live, work and invest,” she said.

Together, those projects — renovating the old City Hall, the Theater Block, the Fitchburg Arts Community (the former BF Brown School) and Fitchburg Public Library expansion — equate to \$100 million in investment, according to Pistone.

The progress of those project was the subject of a morning event at FSU that was attended by private investors, developers, city development officials and Eric Rosengren, chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank in Boston.

Fitchburg Mayor Stephen DiNatale said City Hall renovations are “a little ahead of schedule” and could be completed within two years.

Lapidus said the university will seek a funding to allow for the creation of a restaurant at City Hall, an announcement met with applause from the audience. City Hall Cafe closed last year.

DiNatale noted the proposed library expansion, a project projected to cost about \$31 million, and said the city chose not to table one big project in sake of another.

“We have the fiscal



Fitchburg State President Richard Lapidus speaks during a forum at the university Thursday morning on developments underway to transform the downtown. The ideaLab, a collaborative space, will open next month on the second floor of the Theater Block on Main Street, serving students and non-students alike. Looking on, from left, are Patricia Pistone, Montachusett Opportunity Council vice president, Mayor Stephen DiNatale and Eric Rosengren, chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank in Boston. Below, NewVue Communities Executive Director Marc Dohan, left, and Rosengren address the crowd.

SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE PHOTOS / JOHN LOVE



strength to make these all happen,” he said.

Marc Dohan, executive director of NewVue Communities, said his organi-

zation will close Friday on the former BF Brown school, where the roof was burned out in an early-morning fire two years ago.

The organization will use a \$1.6 million insurance settlement to begin renovating and rebuilding, he said. When completed,

the resulting Fitchburg Arts Community will have 60 units of “artist-preference” housing/work space and a communal “maker

space,” according to Dohan.

NewVue will apply for more funding to perform additional renovations later this year, he said.

“We’re beginning the process to help the phoenix rise from the ashes,” said Dohan.

Matthew Fournier, owner of Elite Construction & Design, and president of Fitchburg Pride, said his company is looking for entrepreneurs and investors to get involved with two projects underway on Main Street.

Fournier is leading renovations to a 7,200 square-foot building at 35 Main St. he said could house two or three commercial retailers when completed.

A 5,700 square-foot building at 409 Main St. is slated house four residential units, with a restaurant at street level, he said.

He said he still needs a restaurateur on board.

“We’ve got a great space, it will have open-air seating and be able to have that city experience that you get in South Boston for a fraction of the cost in Fitchburg,” he said.

Rosengren said Fitchburg was one of four Bay State cities selected to participate in the first round of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston’s Working Cities Challenge.

Through that program the city received \$400,000 grant in 2013. Rosengren said the process of revitalizing a community is a long one, pointing to Boston as a city that improved over decades.

“This kind of work is not about instant gratification,” he said. “It really takes time, hard work and a little bit of luck.”

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Fitchburg State administrators and city officials are working to educate new students, like those shown in 2015 on freshman move-in day, on the positive features of the downtown. SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE FILE PHOTO

IT'S COLLEGE TOWN 101

FSU, city officials aim to get students out and about in Fitchburg

By Elizabeth Dobbins

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FITCHBURG — A walk across the 45-acre Fitchburg State University campus reveals no shortage of backpack-toting students hurrying to and from classes.

But wander even three-quarters of a mile from campus and the chances of spotting even one of the university's over 4,000 students drops dramatically.

Leaders in both the city and university interested in reaping the economic and other benefits of close town-gown relationship have long asked how this could change.

Now students are asking, too.

For the past four months, honors college students enrolled in economics professor Christa Marr's class — "Current Events and Service Learning" — have focused on ways to recast Fitchburg as a "college town."

"(I) don't think people appreciate the gem that we have being so close to Main Street," said Fitchburg State Provost Alberto Cardelle, who suggested this semester's research question. Marr said the feedback from a



Fitchburg State junior Dominique Goyette-Connerty, 19, of Ashby talks about people's perception of Fitchburg in a Current Events and Service Learning class on Tuesday. SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE/JOHN LOVE

listening session and online survey, which drew over 700 responses, an unusually high return rate, offers a good idea of what faculty and students think of Fitchburg and hope to see in the future.

One of the big issues is transportation. Limited parking at FSU means students are reluctant to leave their spots to drive elsewhere. "Once you get a spot on campus,

you don't want to leave it," Marr said.

Students say shuttle service is unreliable and rarely used. Though many say they would be willing to walk downtown, they also bring up the question of safety.

"A lot of people I talk to on campus think this is the 'dirty 'Burg,'"

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Attempting to forge a college town

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said Dominique Goyette-Connerty, an FSU junior who grew up in Ashby. “They seem generally scared about downtown.”

About 70 percent reported safety was a concern, according to the course’s survey. The intersection of North and Main street also ranks in the top 50 highest location for crashes in the state, as reported by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

Executive Director of Community Development Tom Skwierawski said both the city and university are interested in making the less than the mile distance between campus and downtown more walkable and bikeable.

The revitalization and development of the North Street corridor over the past 10 years has not gone unnoticed by students. Alyssa Anderson, a sophomore, said her parents visited with her sister in about 2011 before much of the construction by the university on this strip.

“My dad was like ‘I hated it there.’ It was (like) empty abandoned houses when he first toured here,” Anderson said.

He noticed the improvements when his younger daughter visited. However, even with the changes, Anderson said she was drawn to the modern look of the campus, not the surrounding area.

The students also spoke to a number of people who said they didn’t go downtown, because there weren’t any activities drawing them there. However, sophomore Micalea Goldenberg said the issue might also be marketing.

“Some of the people in the listening project and even in the survey said they wanted a bowling alley and a escape room and Fitchburg already has that,” she said. “It seems like we already have a lot of the stuff in place. We just need people to be aware of what we have.”

Several students in the class said they were excited to learn about some projects slated for downtown Fitchburg, including the renovation City Hall and the artist housing at the former B.F. Brown School.

Though the college announced

the renovation of the Theater Block on Main Street in fall 2016, students said until this class they knew little about the project, which seemed distant from campus.

Though only a handful of students in the class said they were considering staying in Fitchburg after graduation, several were cautiously optimistic for what these developments could mean for the future of the city.

Goyette-Connerty said she has even found herself defending the city after enrolling in the course.

“I’m more quick to scoff at people and correct them now when they’re like ‘Oh yeah, dirty Fitchburg. Whatever.’” she said, laughing. “I’m like, ‘Actually, they’re working really hard to renovate and, in case you didn’t know, City Hall and the FSU Theater Block and all that stuff is going on.’”

But if these changes do have the effect on the city that leaders hope, some wonder what that will mean for the area’s affordability — the factor that convinced many students in the room to choose Fitchburg State.

“If the city gets nicer then maybe the price will go up,” said Goldenberg. “That’s probably why the locals would get better, because they may not be able to afford to stay any more.”

Cardelle said that’s the “double-edged sword” of revitalization efforts, but he believes Fitchburg is still a long way from having that problem. Cardelle has worked at the college since 2016, but in January also became the co-project director of ReImagine North of Main, a community development project for downtown.

Cardelle and others in the college and community plan to listen to the student’s final presentation later this month.

Any insights gained through this presentation will add to other ongoing efforts to bridge the gap between the university and city.

“I think there has to be an understanding that the university’s success is tied to the city’s success,” he said. Next semester, a class is expected to gather feedback on the same topic from members of the community.

Cardelle said city and college administration have forged closer

ties over the past 15 years.

More faculty and staff are also living closer to the campus, which Cardelle in part credits to a push by human resources to encourage new hires to live in the area.

He said the university has increased funding for programming on the weekends to encourage students to stay near campus even when classes aren’t in session.

This all plays into the administration’s goal of making Fitchburg a “destination college,” according to Cardelle.

The concept of fostering a connection between the university and the city isn’t new, said Skwierawski. Building the relationship between the city and the college was listed in city’s strategic plan developed two decades ago.

“Fitchburg State is one of the biggest assets that we have,” Skwierawski said.

It exists alongside other plans for economic development, such as the idea of a creative economy fostered by institutions like the Fitchburg Art Museum.

“We’re not going to see the downtown we want to see with college students alone,” Skwierawski said. However, he added college students are a part of this equation, mentioning other communities, like Lowell, as examples.

“They’re college towns, but they’re also much more than that,” he said.

Beyond bringing more foot traffic downtown, a close relationship with the college has other bonuses like an agreement approved several years ago that allows college and city officials to better communicate about noise complaints, he said. He emphasized the relationship has to be “mutually beneficial.”

Cardelle believes the city and the college are heading in a positive direction, but the results won’t be immediate.

“This kind of work takes time and I understand why,” he said. “People lose patience...It’s an organic process with many starts and stops.”

Follow Elizabeth Dobbins on Twitter @DobbinsSentinel

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Fitchburg State University students, from left, Cassidy Vargas, Nicole Byrne and Bridget Diggins, pose with a group in Ghana.

COURTESY PHOTO

Eye-opening trip for students

Future nurses from Fitchburg State University visit Ghana

By Amanda Burke

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FITCHBURG — Nursing student Cassidy Vargas was humbled to learn patients she treated at a health fair in Ghana last month had little other access to medical care.

“They were using us as their physical, which means they never, ever ever go to the hospital,” she said. “That made me sad, because I can walk into my (primary care physician’s) office like nothing and be seen. For them, they don’t have that

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FSU students learn much in Ghana trip

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luxury.”

Vargas, of Leominster, was one of 12 Fitchburg State University students in the Department of Nursing who traveled to Ghana for a five-credit study abroad program.

During the two-week trip, Vargas and her classmates provided medical services to Ghanaians at “open-air” health fairs at local markets. They examined over 500 patients, performing eye exams, reading vital signs and taking glucose readings.

Vargas also worked in a clinic that provides care to new and expecting mothers. There she saw how limited transportation in Ghana impedes mothers’ ability to access care, leading to high rates of maternal mortality.

“They either don’t have transportation to get to the hospital, or they don’t have transportation to get there to deliver their baby, thus they have their baby at home,” she said.

Professors Deborah Benes and Akwasi Duah organized the program by partnering with Ghana’s West End University. Duah grew up in Ghana, and has lived in the United States for 14 years.

Benes said the program is a step toward training students to become “global health nurses” who are sensitive to cultural differences across nationalities.

“As nurses they need to be culturally aware and culturally sensitive, but were never given the opportunity to go somewhere else and experience another culture,” she said.

Duah said Fitchburg and Worcester County more broadly have a large population of Ghanaian immigrants.

“It’s likely that someone will take care of a Ghanaian patient,” he said.

Students learned how the environment and institutions impacted individuals’ health, the professors said.

“It gave them a real live expe-

rience to see why they might have hypertension or diabetes, and why their life expectancy is lower than ours is,” said Benes.

FSU students screened residents for common medical issues at health-fairs in markets in Kasoa, and in Cape Coast, a city Duah said was formerly the nation’s capital and a center for the slave trade.

For Vargas, the most rewarding aspect of the trip was seeing the difference the medical care she provided made in the lives of patients.

She recalled shadowing a local community health nurse as she visited patients at their homes. In Ghana, these nurses pay regular visits to residents at their homes, where they assess patients and return for follow ups after a health issue, said Vargas.

While shadowing the nurse, Vargas met a woman who was suffering from Tuberculosis and AIDS. The woman’s blood pressure was dangerously low, said Vargas, and she required treatment at a hospital.

They called an ambulance, and Vargas said if not for the visit from the nurse, the woman’s condition may have worsened, she said.

“She said, ‘Thank you so much, I don’t know what I would have done if you hadn’t been regularly checking on me,’” Vargas recalled.

Vargas said Fitchburg would benefit from adopting the visiting nurses model.

“We currently don’t have a system like that,” she said. “We have the (visiting nurses association) but that’s not community nursing; it’s not seeing every single person in the community. I wish we had something like that.”

Duah and Benes want to continue the Ghana study-abroad program for years to come. Students from West End University will travel to Fitchburg State University in October, said Benes, as part of a budding exchange program.



Dr. Deborah Benes, left, and nursing student Cassidy Vargas assess a health fair attendee in Ghana.

COURTESY PHOTO

COLLEGE TOWN

FSU nursing students provide health care in Ghana

By **Bonnie Russell**

Telegram & Gazette Staff

Fitchburg State University nursing professor Deborah Benes would like to create a little army of global nurses and recently realized a first step in that goal when a dozen nursing students from the university spent time in Ghana.

Ms. Benes, who is a nurse practitioner, and nursing professor Akwasi Duah accompanied a team of students to Accra, Ghana, as part of a new program created by the Department of Nursing specifically for nursing majors who are interested in study abroad, which allows them to earn five credits in community health nursing.

Why was Ghana chosen for the inaugural trip?

In addition to the rich cultural heritage of the country, Mr. Duah, who came to the United States from Ghana 14 years ago, said it was easy to set things up because of the connections he has there.

“My uncle is the registrar at West End University and he was able to help arrange an itinerary,” Mr. Duah said.

The group held health fairs at outdoor markets, visited clinics, hospitals and a middle school, as well as engaging in some door-to-door public health work. There was also time to do some sightseeing.

In the door-to-door public health work, the students went out with three Ghanaian community health nurses and talked to people and did screenings and assessments, Ms. Benes said.

Ms. Benes explained that the families they visited lived in compounds, which are large walled areas containing multiple individual rooms that house eight to 10 people. They would spend about a half hour at each, doing quick assessments on ailments and injuries, making referrals if necessary.

“One person had been hit by a car and had pain but could walk,” Ms. Benes said, adding that people often don’t seek treatment because they can’t afford it or don’t have time.

At the Health Fairs, among other things, the students were able to provide information on preventing

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hypertension and diabetes and conduct ear, nose and throat exams.

During a hospital visit to Apam Catholic Hospital the students worked in wards, which are actually separate buildings connected by walkways.

They were assigned to different areas such as pediatrics and male or female to take care of patients for the day.

There isn’t as much technology in Ghana compared to what the students were used to back home and they really had to do a lot of critical thinking, Ms. Benes explained.

The students appreciated seeing the differences in nursing care, “being able to do much with little,” Mr. Duah said.

One of those students is Saisha Matias, 21, of Worcester.

“Studying abroad truly changes perspective. Meeting people who have less than we do yet make so much out of it, taught me to be grateful for what we have. It taught me how to give back without regret. This experience has marked who I am as a person, and my passion for community outreach. I hope to inspire young people to give back to their community and push themselves despite the circumstances they may face. I am grateful to have experienced community health nursing in Ghana,” Ms. Matias, a senior working toward a bachelor’s in the science of nursing, wrote in an email.



This section of the Nashua River lies in Lancaster near the Bennett's Bridge on Route 117.

SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE FILE PHOTO

RIVER RESEARCH REVEALED

FSU students present a look at the Nashua

By **Amanda Burke**
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FITCHBURG — The health of the Nashua River, the diversity of fish within it, and how often local residents participate in activities at the river were all topics of original research Fitchburg State University students presented on Thursday.

“The health of the river is a good indicator of the overall environment,” said Earth and Geographic Science Professor Jane Huang.

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Fitchburg State students presented the results of their nine-week summer research projects Thursday at President's Hall. The projects explored various facets of the health of the local community and the Nashua River watershed.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY



Members of the organization Clean Streets waded through the Nashua River in Leominster during a cleanup effort.

SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE FILE PHOTO

Students reveal river research

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Huang was one of several faculty members who advised the students during the five-week, paid summer research project.

The students presented their findings before peers, professors and a few city officials at the President's Hall. Research funding was provided in part by the Lloyd G. Balfour Foundation, Bank of America and the Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts.

Students Alesia Burnett and Nicole Zwicker studied fish diversity at nine points along the Nashua River, discovering biodiversity was low in both urban and non-urban areas, Burnett said.

"It's not just urbanization" contributing to the lack of biodiversity, she said.

A four-person research team of Jacob Elie, Robert Snider, Monica Liao Queliz, and Benjamin Borodawka studied recreational physical activity

among local adults.

The team looked at the prevalence of "physical recreational activity" among participants, assessing trends among socio-economic and racial groups and barriers to accessing the city's parks and trails.

The students found lower rates of activity among racial and ethnic minorities, according to Liao Queliz. In many cases, participants lacked transportation to areas for outdoor recreation or didn't know about them.

"Public transportation is a big factor for a lot of people," said Elie, adding that future research could focus on spreading awareness of public parks and increasing access to public transportation.

Another research duo, Heather Bosworth and Chelsea Lashua, simulated the conditions of the Nashua River found in urban and non-urban areas.

By measuring plant respiration and the presence of biological matter, the

students showed that streams running through rural and forested areas are more "healthy" than urban waterways.

"The more urban a stream is, the more polluted the water," said Lashua.

Emmanuella Agyemang, Rachel Bordieri, Camila Perlas De Leon, Alexander Joscelyn and Lily Price studied overall health in Fitchburg. Anne Saball, a student research mentor, presented research on the health of the Nashua River watershed, and Samuel Gallagher studied how land on it.

Caroline Anderson used a digital simulation to show how various levels of flooding would impact the city, finding its southeast area is the most vulnerable.

Samantha Richard found the presence of microplastics in the river, and Jack Gangemi and Benjamin McGuire presented original research on water quality of the watershed.

FSU increasing transfer credit limit

FITCHBURG — Effective immediately, Fitchburg State University is increasing the limit of earned academic credits that prospective students can transfer from other institutions of higher education.

The move aligns with Fitchburg State's values of accessibility and affordability, and will make it easier for transfer students to keep their academic progress on track.

The new policy allows transfer students to bring 90 credits from accredited four-year institutions and 75 credits from regionally accredited two-year schools. The previous caps were 75 credits from four-year schools and 60 credits from two-year institutions.

The university is not changing its requirement that transfer students complete at least 50 percent of the coursework in their major at Fitchburg State, as well as one-quarter of their overall undergraduate credits.

For more information, please visit www.fitchburgstate.edu/admissions/undergraduate/requirements/transfer/

Public colleges confront student hunger, housing needs over summer

Central Mass. campuses open food pantries

By Scott O'Connell
Telegram & Gazette Staff

WORCESTER – Equipped with new statistical evidence showing the extensive need on their campuses, local public colleges and universities are ramping up efforts to provide safety net programs to students over the summer break.

This year, all four public colleges in Central Massachusetts have launched or plan to launch new on-campus food pantries as a stopgap measure to help students struggling to find meals. Those schools also have introduced or tried to better publicize

existing programs aimed at students dealing with hunger, homelessness, or other issues between semesters.

The state's higher education department has also focused its attention on the problem, and is testing ideas of its own that could provide solutions.

Unlike the state's public K-12 schools, which can lean on federal funding to provide summer meals programs and other social service outreach during the long break, the public higher education system, already cash-strapped, is attempting to tackle student poverty without much government assistance.

"I think our public institutions have really stepped up on this, without funding from us,

and without prodding from us," said the state's higher education commissioner, Carlos Santiago.

Hunger, homelessness widespread

While local college officials said they have always known some of their students struggle to get by, a pioneering study of the state's public higher education campuses released this spring for the first time provided the stark numbers behind the issue. According to that report, 44 percent of community college students and 33 percent of state university students said they were struggling to feed themselves, while 49 percent of the former and 32 of the latter also

had trouble finding permanent housing.

"I've gone through it in my own life – I know how it feels," said Ashley Forhan, a second-year student at Quinsigamond Community College, which is why the Clinton native jumped at the chance to operate the school's first on-site food pantry, opening next week.

Ms. Forhan, who will oversee the donation-funded pantry through a work-study program at the college, said hunger can put people in a "criminality mindset – you do whatever it takes to get food ... you're not thinking straight; you're not thinking clearly." She and Quinsigamond officials said it was not uncommon for some

students to simply steal items from the campus cafeteria.

"They were struggling, and there was an embarrassment factor," said Theresa Vecchio, Quinsigamond's dean of students, who said the college now has a policy where cashiers will discreetly comp students who can't pay for their meal and point them to her office for help if they're dealing with persistent food insecurity.

Worcester State University offers a similar service to desperate students through its emergency fund program, which provides money for meals and other necessities. Students are developing an on-campus food

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pantry, which should debut sometime in the next six months, said Julie Kazarian, dean of students.

In addition, the university is working on a plan to offer year-round housing contracts, in an effort to accommodate students who can't find lodging elsewhere during the summer and winter breaks. Worcester State enrolls several students coming out of foster care, for example, she said. "They don't always necessarily have somewhere else to go" when the dorms empty out in May, she said.

Both Fitchburg State University and Mount Wachusett Community College have made food pantries available over the summer at their campuses for the first time this year. Officials at the schools said the services have received dozens of visits from students since the spring semester ended.

"It's clearly a need. We found the same thing over the winter break as well," said Shelley Errington Nicholson, director of Mount Wachusett's Brewer Center for Civic Learning and Community Engagement. "We know their needs don't end just because class isn't in session."

Funding hard to come by

At all four public campuses in the region, offices are open throughout the summer to help students connect with and navigate external social service programs like the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Quinsigamond's food pantry, which is scheduled to have a soft opening on July 10, will have a confidential intake program on site.

But the colleges themselves aren't able to rely much on government assistance to cover their summer social programs. With most public campuses in line to receive negligible increases in their state funding next year, local officials said they are relying entirely on fundraising and food drives to stock their food pantries' shelves this summer.

"I would love to see some sort of funding for a supplemental meal program, similar to what's done at the K-12 level," Ms. Nicholson said, referring to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's nutrition initiatives, which reimburse elementary and secondary schools for the cost of providing

free meals to students.

For now, at least, college officials can rely on the state's higher education department to support their efforts, even if it can't provide funding for them. Mr. Santiago said his administration is trying to help. It has worked to convince state-operated housing programs to be more open to accepting college students, for example – and is working on some statewide initiatives of its own.

The higher education department is partnering with state agencies and campus presidents on a pilot program that would allow a small number of community college students to live in state university dorms, for instance, a step toward solving the housing dilemma for a Massachusetts community college system that does not have on-campus residences. While the locations for that proposal have yet to be worked out, Mr. Santiago said, he's been encouraged by the overall buy-in from college presidents.

"I think it's important for us to find the institutional leaders that will lead the way" on the hunger and housing issues, he said. "I've quite frankly put homelessness and food security as one of the things I'm working on."

Erasing the stigma

Money alone can't solve one of the most challenging problems dogging campuses' food and housing outreach efforts. Especially over the summer, local officials said, it's difficult not only to inform students that services are available, but also to persuade them to take advantage.

"There's a lot of stigma surrounding anybody needing help, really," and college students are no exception, said Heather Mazzaferro, who works in Fitchburg State's housing and residential services division.

While she's only been in her position since December, Ms. Mazzaferro recalled instances of hungry students asking to take something from the candy basket in her office, or the time one student "wouldn't make eye contact" out of shame when he asked her for the directions to a free food program going on in her building.

"When he walked out the door, I just started crying, that somebody has to feel that way just about eating," she said.

Other campus administrators acknowledged that social pressure is especially high on college students to be self-reliant,

even though many of them are already pushing themselves just to be able to afford their classes.

"Some of these students are paying for college, they're paying for their car and insurance – they're putting themselves through," said Shane Franzen, associate director of student development at Fitchburg State. "In order to do that, they end up having to couch surf some nights, or get someone to get them into the dining hall to get a meal."

The particular challenges facing college students – and public college students especially, who are increasingly likely to be first-generation students from low-income and/or immigrant families – makes the location of support services on their campuses especially critical, some local officials said, even if those same services also exist off campus.

"I feel like there's more of a comfort level when you're at a place for four years and you can find people that you trust there," Ms. Mazzaferro said, adding that she hopes the increasing availability of campus-based food and housing programs will help "normalize" the idea of students seeking assistance.

Some college officials said they have started to notice a change already.

"People are talking about it now. They're coming forward more," Ms. Nicholson said. "They're more comfortable asking for help."

The long-term view

At the same time, campus administrators acknowledged their institutions' limited means prevents them from singlehandedly solving the problem. Mount Wachusett's food pantry, for example, which allows students to take up to 20 items a month, is only supposed "to be a Band-Aid," Ms. Nicholson said.

But there's also a sense at local colleges that it's in everyone's best interests, including the institutions themselves, for them to be more involved in helping students. Several campus officials pointed out that unaddressed hunger and homelessness ultimately prevents students from staying in college and graduating, leaving them without the real solution – a college degree – that could help them permanently climb out of poverty.

"We need to meet their needs, if we want them to succeed," Mr. Santiago said. "Otherwise, we're just a revolving door."

SERVICE WITH A SMILE



ABOVE: Fitchburg State University freshman Ashley Perez smiles as she helps fill bags with the ingredients for minestrone soup in the gym at the university's Recreation Center on Tuesday morning for the area's needy. This project is sponsored by the United Way of North Central Mass. and the university and is part of freshmen orientation. All of the ingredients for the soups are brought by "The Outreach Program." The ingredients for the soup are pasta, pinto beans, soy beans, dehydrated vegetables and red sauce. **See a slide show at sentinelandenterprise.com.**

RIGHT: Sophomore Mariah Vanderveer helps keep track of the number of bags before they are boxed up during the event.



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FSU doesn't want pot on its 'doorstep'

By Elizabeth Dobbins

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FITCHBURG — Should retail marijuana be sold on Main Street? Not so fast, says Fitchburg State University President Richard Lapidus.

In a letter sent to City Councilors on Friday, Lapidus outlined the university's concerns with a proposed zoning ordinance that would allow non-medical marijuana retailers to open on Main Street east of Blossom Street.

"While the Commonwealth has approved recreational use of marijuana and the city is rightly being deliberate in its determining where retail outlets will be allowed, we do not wish to see the eastern edge of Main Street — the doorstep of our campus — included in this district," he wrote.

Councilors have revised the proposed zoning ordinance several times this spring. The current version would allow shops, for the most part, to open on both sides of Main Street from Blossom to Lunenburg Street.

However, the north side of Main Street from Snow Street to Willow Street is not zoned as a commercial business district even though businesses are located in this area, according to Executive Director of Community Development Tom Skwierawski. The same is true for North Street between Main Street and Pearl Street.

Skwierawski said it's unclear whether the current proposal would also allow marijuana retailers to locate in these areas.

Regardless, Lapidus has already expressed his stance on the issue, which calls for keeping these retailers away from campus.

"The campus and the city have worked hard to revitalize the North Street corridor and to create a



Fitchburg State Univ. President Richard Lapidus

FSU president wants to keep marijuana off school's 'doorstep'

LAPIDUS/From Page 1

more family-friendly feel,” he wrote in the letter. “As thousands of students and their parents travel this route on a regular basis, the addition of a retail marijuana shop would not enhance perceptions of the area and could be detrimental to enrollment.”

Even though recreational marijuana is legal in Massachusetts, Lapidus said the substance will not be allowed at the univer-

sity, because it is still federally illegal.

In his letter he praised the city's revitalization efforts and the college's collaboration with the city, but said the current proposed district would be “ill-advised.”

“It will always be easier to add locations once the implications of them are assessed,” he wrote. “Alternatively, the removal of locations that result in unanticipated and undesired conse-

quences will be far more difficult to address.”

Mayor Stephen DiNatale said he hopes City Council will weigh the university's concerns, which he said he shares.

“I would have concerns with that type of business in the college neighborhood,” he said.

City Council is expected to next discuss the ordinance Tuesday night.

Follow Elizabeth Dobbins on Twitter @DobbinsSentinel



Catherine Canney, Fitchburg State University associate vice president for academic affairs, received the Leadership Award from the Massachusetts National Network of Women Leaders.

COURTESY PHOTO

FSU's Canney honored for leadership

FITCHBURG — Catherine Canney, Fitchburg State University associate vice president for academic affairs, received the Leadership Award from the Massachusetts National Network of Women Leaders in recognition of her efforts to support women in higher education.

Canney has worked at Fitchburg State for more than 30 years, beginning as a staff assistant and coordinator of special projects up to more senior roles, including graduate and continuing education program dean.

The Leadership Award is presented to a woman leader in higher education who has significantly promoted women in the field.

The awardee exemplifies the principles of the American Council on Education National Network: IDEALS, which stands for identify, develop, encourage, advance, link and support women to advance their careers in higher education.

"Cathy demonstrates her commitment to the advancement of women

through the example she provides every day as a female leader who is respected on campus for her knowledge, her ability to follow through and successfully implement new ideas, new processes, and programs, coupled with her passion for student service and making access to quality education a priority for the university," Fitchburg State President Richard S. Lapidus said in his letter nominating Canney for the accolade.

"While serving as a role model to men and women alike at the university, Cathy has always made time to support the advancement of other women through mentorship and taking the time to listen, counsel and advise."

Among the testimonials offered by other women at Fitchburg State in nominating Canney for recognition were:

• "I am a better person, educator, mentor, advisor and women for having worked beside her," said Director of Extended Campus & Professional Studies Lisa Moison. "It is my hope

that my colleagues and I, in some small way, can pass on her wisdom and guidance to the next generation of emerging leaders at Fitchburg State University."

• "She takes 100 percent responsibility on projects and sees them through to successful completion," said Director of Marketing Kelly Norris. "She is committed to constant self-improvement and shares learned knowledge with her colleagues. She empowers other women, and has empowered me in my career for over 20 years."

• "She has always encouraged me and other women to raise our sights, act with confidence, and thoughtfully advocate for ourselves," said Director of Special Projects Jessica Augat. "This is a woman who goes out of her way to support other women. She takes the time, that in many cases she truly doesn't have, to counsel."

• "She constantly strives to produce exceptional and innovative results in all areas of her work and inspires those around her to do the

same," said Director of the Grant Center Karen Frank Mays. "Cathy is an extraordinary role model for all of us who work with her."

Canney completed her master's degree at Fitchburg State in educational leadership and management and her doctorate in higher education administration at New England College, both while working full-time at the university.

Among the major initiatives she has spearheaded at Fitchburg State are the strategic vision and development of online programs; partnerships to expand general collaboration and continuing education; accreditation review; and leading innovative and regional approaches to early college high school programming.

"We cannot imagine a more deserving person for this award," Lapidus said. "Cathy is a role model, someone who has progressively worked her way into increasing levels of responsibility while encouraging and supporting others to advance along the way."

25 Investigates: Mass. universities struggle to meet mental health demands

The scope of mental health treatment at colleges and universities in Massachusetts varies widely from institution to institution, leaving some on-campus counseling centers unequipped to handle rising demand from struggling students, 25 Investigates found.

25 Investigates contacted 50 schools statewide over the course of three months, and 19 of them -- including major institutions like Harvard -- provided no response.

The survey, which also gathered information from university websites, shows big differences in how many counselors each school keeps on staff, as well as other variations that some students say are keeping them from getting the help they need.

A report from the Center for Collegiate Mental Health at Penn State shows demand for counseling services at colleges shot up 30 to 40 percent from 2010 to 2015, far outpacing enrollment, which rose only 5 percent in that time period.

“Rapidly rising demand, paired with risk and flat funding, seem to be making it increasingly difficult for counseling centers to maintain treatment capacity for students who need it,” [the report says](#).

The problem is especially grave considering the fact 1,400 college students died by suicide in the U.S. in 2016, as noted in [a recent presentation to the UMass Board of Trustees](#).

Counseling centers deal with the deluge of students in different ways, according to the CCMH report. Some have long waits for initial appointments or impose weeks-long intervals between counseling sessions, with centers in Massachusetts among them.

REACHING OUT FOR HELP -- AND NOT FINDING IT

Kavita Singh, 22, was in her second year at Northeastern when she said she started isolating herself, skipping class, and questioning her very existence.

“I didn’t know how to deal with it, so I went to the university,” said Singh.

Singh said she has an anxiety disorder, and getting help from Northeastern’s University Health and Counseling Services was a struggle.

“On average, each time I called them to schedule an appointment, it would take a month,” she said. “It was only until I was a threat to myself that the university expressed concern for me.”

Northeastern did not respond to repeated requests for an on-camera interview about mental health services on campus.

A spokesperson confirmed the school has 15 mental health professionals on staff, meaning there is one counselor for about every 1,700 students, according to the school's most recent enrollment numbers.

The spokesperson also said Northeastern does not limit the amount of counseling sessions a student can have, which is not true at other institutions in Massachusetts.

The review by 25 Investigates found six schools in the state place specific caps on the number of counseling sessions available to students. Clark University decided to cap students at six sessions per semester after demand for services soared by almost 50 percent between 2013 and 2015, according to Clark's counseling center's website.

"While we are glad that students are utilizing our services more for help, we were finding that we couldn't accommodate everyone in a timely manner. So we had to make a decision – have people wait a long time to get in or limit the frequency of their sessions," the website says.

Other colleges and universities have no specific session limit but offer "brief" or "short-term" counseling. Several schools in both categories, including Clark, say there are exceptions to these rules.

DEALING WITH THE "TSUNAMI"

Dr. Chris Flynn is the head of Virginia Tech's counseling center and the president of the International Association of Counseling Services, an organization that sets standards for college centers and accredits about 200 of them.

"We're sort of still in the middle of this -- what feels like a tsunami," he said, describing the huge surge in demand for counseling appointments. "But (it's) a positive thing. It's a great thing that students are seeking out counseling services on a college campus."

And when it comes to dealing with the tsunami, he said, there is no one solution for every school.

"At what point do you have adequate services to serve every student that may attend your university?" said Flynn.

In Massachusetts, Fitchburg State University's counseling center isn't closing its doors to the tsunami -- it's leaving them open for as long as possible, offering unlimited free counseling to all students.

Dr. Robert Hynes has been in charge there for 17 years, and he said more students are coming in for help than ever before.

"I don't think anyone has been able to pinpoint why we're seeing such a dramatic increase," said Hynes, who theorized reduced stigma and greater access to counseling before people go to college could partly explain why more students are seeking out help on campus.

Hynes called unlimited counseling a way to keep students in school, especially for the students who cannot afford mental health care off campus.

"Those students tend to do an awful lot better when we can see them 10 times a year, 15 times a year, versus other models where you see them maybe 5 or 6 sessions and then you're forced to make a referral out," said Hynes. "If we did not engage in counseling with our students, as well as other student support services, then we would have a fairly substantial proportion of students who would not be successful here."

Even if one of Hynes' students could pay for an outside counselor, he said, the City of Fitchburg has far fewer mental health providers than Boston.

One of the challenges of Hynes' job is to get in touch with the students who may never come to the counseling center on their own, which is why he leads gatekeeper trainings.

Gatekeepers are people who come into contact with students every day, such as resident assistants and other university staff members. The training teaches them about the warning signs of suicide and simple interventions they can make.

"The most acutely at risk people in our community may never knock on the door of a mental health professional or a medical health professional or somebody that can help," Hynes said. "What we need are lots of deputies out there."

Professors make up one group that comes into contact with students daily, and many schools have trainings available for them, but only Massachusetts Maritime Academy told 25 Investigates that training is mandatory.

A LACK OF CARE, AND THE CONSEQUENCES

Kavita Singh eventually got the help she needed from an outside counselor. Now, she's part of a student group advocating for more counselors at Northeastern and pressing the university to take more responsibility for the mental health of its students.

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court recently found MIT was not negligent in the 2009 suicide of a grad student, but said universities do have a responsibility to prevent suicides in some cases.

Providing accessible mental health services is part of the deal universities make with their paying students, Singh said.

"Students deserve care," she said. "They're spending their money. Their tuition is 60 thousand dollars a year. It shouldn't be hard for the school to provide."

Burke takes reins as AD for Falcons

Matthew J. Burke hopes to take Falcons athletics to the next level as the new athletic director at Fitchburg State University.

Burke comes to Fitchburg State after a lengthy tenure at Mount Ida College, another NCAA Division III program.

“My philosophy is grounded in what Division III is all about,” he said. “The number one priority is to be a student and earn a degree.

I also believe that athletics provides a lot of valuable life lessons. I want every student-athlete to represent the department with pride, wherever they are.”

Burke was hired following the retirement of long-time athletic director



Matthew J. Burke

Sue Lauder, whose 22-year tenure with the Falcons included being named the DIII Under Armour Athletic Director of the Year in 2017. That honor was bestowed in recognition of Lauder’s efforts to enhance athletics and recreation opportunities at the university, including the addition of women’s varsity lacrosse and volleyball.

“I am excited about the leadership and vision that Matt Burke will bring to Falcon athletics,” said Vice President for Student Affairs Laura Bayless. “Sue Lauder’s retirement left big shoes to fill, and I know that Matt’s strong experience has prepared him well to lead our athletic department to new heights.”

Burke’s career at Mount Ida College dates to 1998, including the last seven years as executive director of athletics. His time there has seen an expansion of athletic facilities and addition of new varsity sports.

At Fitchburg State, Burke said he hopes to support the university’s student-athletes with similar passion.

“I believe in an individualized approach, and I want to see improvement for students academically as well as on the field,” he said.

Burke earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Sport Management from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and received his master’s in Business Administration from Nichols College.

DOING THEIR CIVIC DAYS DUTY IN FITCHBURG



This years Civic's Days in Fitchburg raised \$39,000 that was given to the city by many company sponsors. Holding the \$39,000 check is Diane Burnette and Mayor Stephen DiNatale, on left. With them holding checks for the amounts they gave are, from left, Mount Wachusett Community College Vice President Lea Ann Scales, Melissa Kuehl with Rollstone Bank, Joe Bowen the Chairman of the Fitchburg Cultural Council, Fidelity Bank Personal Banker Kaitlyn Lillie, Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority Board Member Jim Hohman and Board Chairman Tom Donnelly and Fitchburg State University Vice President of Student Affairs Laura Bayless.

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The 122nd annual Fitchburg State University Commencement was held on Saturday in the university's Recreation Center. Graduates Samantha Eberlin of Leominster, left, and Corinne Desimone of Dennis take a picture before the ceremony started. **See photo slideshow at www.sentinelandenterprise.com.**

SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE/JOHN LOVE

After years of hard work, FSU Class of 2018 graduates ready for the real world

By Peter Jasinski
pjasinski@sentinelandenterprise.com

FITCHBURG — Diplomas in hand, more than 600 undergraduate students walked across Fitchburg State University's stage Saturday and into a world that university President Richard Lapidus referred to in his commencement address as "increasingly charged and strained."

However, few of the university's most recent graduating students seemed very troubled by what waited for them on the other side of the stage.

"As a shy, soft-spoken student who

lacked confidence, I would have never had the courage four years ago to speak here today had I not taken chances during my undergraduate career," said mathematics student Kristin Ann Windolowski in her valedictory speech. "Look at us now. Our personal growth before our first and last day here are evident. We are wise, stronger, and more confident."

Windolowski was joined by FSU faculty and alumni in reminding graduates that they had the keys to succeed in a world outside of college. For Lapidus, it was an opportunity to urge departing students to

embody the qualities of empathy, kindness, and moral courage as they leave Fitchburg State.

"Moral courage is about the willingness to be challenged by adversity, the acceptance of uncertain outcomes and the strength in the conviction of your beliefs," he said. "In the end, we must all realize that life is about choices and the willingness to take risk."

The risks alluded to by Lapidus were something retired brigadier general and

Please see **GRADS/5**



The 122nd annual Fitchburg State University Commencement was held on Saturday. Nathan Sidney Goldman from Leominster, left, and Ryan Patrick Hill from Billerica check out their diplomas.

SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE/JOHN LOVE

FSU grads excited for future

GRADS/From Page 1

Fitchburg State University alumnus Frederick Henry said the class of 2018 is prepared to take on, just as the school had prepared him for success more than 30 years ago.

“Like some of you, I came to this great institution with no real idea of what I wanted to be or what degree program I wanted to pursue. However, I left this institution with a Falcon spirit and ready to start my journey,” Henry said in his address

to students. “I left this institution wise, as I know all of you will do today.”

In recognition of his decades of service in the U.S. Army and accomplishments in the private sector, Henry was awarded an honorary doctorate of letters during Saturday’s ceremony.

Mayor Stephen DiNatale, another alumnus, thanked students for their time spent in Fitchburg.

“I have no doubt our community has been enriched by your collective contributions and I wish

that you continue to have an impact on its bright future,” he said.

As glad as he was to now have his degree, Ethan Comrie, a criminal justice student from Weymouth, said he was leaving Fitchburg with mixed emotions.

“It’s bittersweet,” he said. “I am happy it’s over, but I don’t want to leave. It’s another home for me here.”

Follow Peter Jasinski on Twitter @PeterJasinski53

FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATION

Brigadier general's order: Make good choices

By Paula J. Owen
Correspondent

FITCHBURG – The rain and unseasonably cold temperatures Saturday may have moved Fitchburg State University's commencement exercises indoors, but it didn't dampen the excitement of graduates and those celebrating their special moment with them in the packed Athletics and Recreation Center.

Approximately 600 students graduated Saturday.

The commencement address was given by retired U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Frederick A. Henry, a 1984 FSU graduate.

"In 1984, my graduation served as a pivotal moment for me, as your graduation will serve as a defining moment for you," Gen. Henry said. "When I sat in your seat, I did not

have all the answers and I was nervous about how the next chapter would unfold."

He said looking back, there was nothing special about what he did.

"I just positioned myself to take advantage of opportunities I was presented," he said. "Like me, each of you will be presented with choices. What you do with the choices presented to you will shape your own individual stories and legacy."

Coming from "modest means" growing up in Cambridge, he said he aspired to be a professional tennis player, not making higher education a priority, but knowing he wanted a life beyond the limitations of his community.

However, his high school counselor encouraged him not to give up on going to college.

"So, when I arrived at Fitchburg State I was looking for a reason to say 'no' to the college experience," he said. "But, Fitchburg helped me say 'yes.' I did not choose Fitchburg State. Fitchburg State chose me. (FSU) welcomed me and provided me with the academic support I needed to gain confidence as a college student."

He said he found a sanctuary at FSU that cultivated his intellectual curiosity and the school provided him with opportunities to discover his leadership potential.

He would join the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) at FSU and several weeks later, head to Fort Knox, Kentucky, for ROTC basic training that was the

See FSU, B4



Retired Brig. Gen. Frederick Henry gives the commencement address during the 122nd commencement ceremony at Fitchburg State University Saturday. View a photo gallery at telegram.com. [T&G STAFF/ASHLEY GREEN]

FSU

From Page B3

beginning of his 30-year military career.

"That goes to show you that it doesn't matter your gender, ethnicity or social status. When you start your journey just keep it moving and believe in yourself and never let anyone derail your dream," he told the graduates.

"Never forget that you are a Fitchburg State University Falcon," he added. "The Falcon is often symbolized for its supreme focus, speed, strategic vision and fearless character. These are attributes that were engrained in you here at (FSU) and will be cultivated during your journey long after this milestone moment."

Gen. Henry received an honorary degree during the ceremony from FSU President Richard S. Lapidus who also spoke at the ceremony.

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NEW BEGINNINGS: Robby Denaud, from Haiti, who now lives in Boston, joins the crowd of immigrants take the oath of citizenship during a naturalization ceremony at Fitchburg State's Weston Auditorium Friday. **See slide show at sentinelandenterprise.com.**

SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE PHOTOS / JOHN LOVE

With every oath, a dream

Immigrants from 54 nations celebrate citizenship at FSU ceremony

By Elizabeth Dobbins
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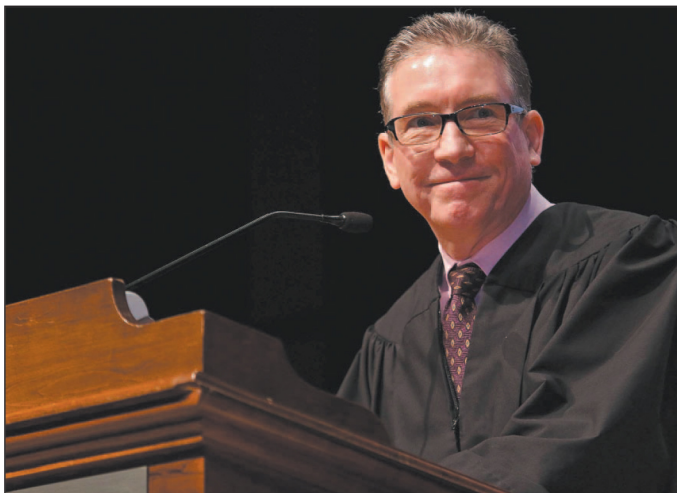
FITCHBURG — Some came for love. Others came for a new life.

In total, 206 people became naturalized U.S. citizens Friday during a ceremony at Fitchburg State University.

The newly minted Americans come from 54 nations and now live in 35 communities across the state.

Marcos Ferreira flexed with his certificate for a commemorative photo after the ceremony.

Ferreira came to the United States from Brazil when he was 19 years old



U.S. District Court Judge David Hennessey addresses the new citizens and the crowd.

interested in going to college and learning a new language. From the time he first

applied for citizenship in his mid-20s, it took six years and a cross-country move for Fer-

reira, now 31, to become a U.S. citizen.

The journey was also long for Lawrence resident Benita Kalala, who immigrated from the Democratic Republic of Congo as an 11-year-old refugee fleeing war.

"It's been a long time. Since I was very young," she said. "Like, I'm 23 right now and since I was 5 it's been a hustle."

Oluwatomi Keshinro was surrounded by family as she became a U.S. Citizen. Originally from Nigeria, she moved to the United States in 2013 to be with her husband Rilwan Keshinro.

"When the snail moves,

Please see **CITIZENS/6**



Rupesh Kotapati, from India, left, who now lives in Westford, takes the oath of citizenship during a naturalization ceremony at Fitchburg State's Weston Auditorium Friday. At right, Wern Sepasouk, from Laos, who also lives in Westford, shares the moment.



Immigrants from 54 nations celebrate new horizons

CITIZENS/From Page 1

the shell comes along," her husband said, describing how the two eventually made the international

move together.

Love also brought Chris Stewart and Josie Stewart, who both received their certificate Friday, to the United States.

Though Chris Stewart is from the United Kingdom and Josie Stewart is from Brazil, they met in Switzerland.

Citizenship will allow

them to get more involved in their community and provide more opportunities for their 12-year-old and 9-year-old children, they said.

Jessica Castillo and her mother Rosa Castro immigrated from the Dominican Republic, one of the most well represented countries at the ceremony.

Now that both are citizens Castillo's next goal is to attend college to study journalism.

Castillo's reason for the move was simple: to seek "a better life."

Follow Elizabeth Dobbins on Twitter @DobbinsSentinel.



Fitchburg Mayor Stephen DiNatale addresses the new citizens.



Vandy Ngeth, from Cambodia, who now lives in Lowell, and Jeanne D'arc Kanyange, from the Congo, who also now lives in Lowell, take the oath.

Court vacates Kennedy cousin Skakel's conviction in 1975 killing of Conn. girl

By Dave Collins
Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. — In a stunning reversal, the Connecticut Supreme Court on Friday overturned Kennedy cousin Michael Skakel's murder conviction in the 1975 bludgeoning death of a girl in wealthy Greenwich.

The high court issued a 4-3 ruling that Skakel's trial attorney failed to present evidence of an alibi. The same court in December 2016 had reinstated Skakel's conviction after a lower court ordered a new trial, citing mistakes by the trial attorney, Mickey Sherman.

It wasn't immediately clear if prosecutors will subject Skakel to a new trial. A spokesman for Chief State's Attorney Kevin Kane said prosecutors were reviewing the new ruling. He declined further comment.

Skakel, a nephew of Robert F. Kennedy's widow, Ethel Kennedy, was convicted of murder in 2002 in the death of Martha Moxley in 1975 when they were teenagers. He was sentenced to 20 years to life in prison, but was freed on \$1.2 million bail after serving 11 years behind bars when the lower court overturned his murder conviction in 2013.



Michael Skakel leaves the state Supreme Court after his hearing in Hartford, Conn., in February 2016.

AP FILE PHOTO

The case has drawn international attention because of the Kennedy name, Skakel's rich family, numerous theories about who killed Moxley and the brutal way in which she died. Several other people, including Skakel's brother Tommy Skakel, have been mentioned as possible killers.

The slaying took place in the exclusive Bell Haven section of Greenwich where Martha and Skakel were neighbors. At trial, prosecutors said Skakel was angry with Martha because she had spurned his advances while having a sexual liaison with his brother Tommy.

Skakel's appellate lawyer, Hubert Santos, had asked the Supreme Court to reconsider its

2016 ruling, resulting in Friday's decision.

"We're elated that our argument was vindicated," Santos said Friday. "It was a good decision because it was spot on the law."

Santos argued that Sherman made poor decisions, including not focusing on Skakel's brother as a possible suspect and failing to attempt to contact an alibi witness. Santos said Skakel was several miles away from the crime scene on Oct. 30, 1975 watching a Monty Python movie with friends when Moxley was bludgeoned with a golf club.

Santos also has said there was no physical evidence or eyewitnesses linking Skakel to the killing.

Library, FSU present 'Piece of My Heart'

FITCHBURG — “A Piece of My Heart,” the powerful, true story of six women (five nurses and a country singer) sent to Vietnam, reveals their struggles to make sense of the war.

Fitchburg Public Library, in collaboration with Fitchburg State University, presents two free dramatic readings — at 3 p.m., on Sunday, July 8, and at 7 p.m., on Monday, July 9, at the library, 610 Main St.

The production is produced in honor of all Vietnam veterans and The

Wall that Heals replica that will be at Crocker Field from July 12-15.

The script, written by Shirley Lauro in 1991, is based on the 1985 book, “A Piece of My Heart: The stories of 26 American women who served in Vietnam.”

Beyond the shared experiences of the Vietnam veterans, the book has an additional local component: One of the nurses in the book is Donna Peck who lives in Westminster.

The production is directed by Fitchburg State University alumna

Kelly Stowell. The actors are FSU alumni Amy DuMar-DuBois, Shani Farrell, Lindsay Flathers-Friend, Lisa Nguyen and Angela Renzi, as well as current FSU students Shani Farrell and Natalie Scott. Nick Wakely plays the American men who appear in the stories.

The six women share their thoughts, feelings and emotions, beginning with how they came to be in the service, their dedication to service, and the reaction they received when they returned to the U.S.

COMMENTARY

AS I SEE IT

The road from Reagan to Trump: Selecting Justice Kennedy's successor

By Paul I. Weizer

Picture the scene. The American people elected a president who ran as a hard-line conservative, more so than any president elected in a generation. Following his victory, he sought to remake the system by reducing the size of government, cutting regulations, and championing a massive tax cut. A believer in supply side economics, this president believed that by cutting taxes on the wealthy, the money would trickle down to middle class and poorer Americans. The tax cuts would create massive deficits but were promised to pay for themselves. This was 1980, but also applies to 2018.

The Reagan years provide several interesting parallels to the current situation regarding the Supreme Court. Just as with President Trump, President Reagan was able, in his first year in office, to reward his supporters with a conservative appointment to the Supreme Court in the form of Sandra Day O'Connor. However, our stories parallel again with the retirement of another Republican appointee, Justice Anthony Kennedy.

As we look back on Kennedy's career, it is interesting to recall that Kennedy was not Reagan's first choice. During the period between the appointment of O'Connor in 1981 and the two picks which would follow, the Federalist Society rose to prominence as a pipeline for conservative legal talent in Republican administrations. Among the early leaders of this movement, using "original intent" to interpret the Constitution, were the next two Reagan nominees, Antonin Scalia and then Robert Bork. During the campaign in 2016, President Trump publicly stated that all of his judicial nominees would be picked by the Federalist Society. He went so far as to release a list of potential nominees which is posted on the White House website: bit.ly/TrumpListing. Trump's first appointee, Neil



Gorsuch, is a Federalist Society member. Undoubtedly, his next choice will be as well. By making ideological purity the requirement for judicial considerations, it is unlikely there could be another Sandra Day O'Connor or Anthony Kennedy.

In 1987, Reagan first nominated Judge Robert Bork to fill the vacancy of retiring Justice Lewis Powell. However, many justices of that era rose above party once on the bench, often disappointing the presidents who nominated them. Reagan's first two appointments (O'Connor and Antonin Scalia) were ideological matches for their predecessors. Each was confirmed without a single vote in opposition.

Powell's retirement would be different, as the hard-line Bork would have shifted the court after Powell's service as an open-minded centrist. The Bork hearings were a spectacle.

Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy famously stated that "In Robert Bork's America, women would be forced into back-alley abortions, blacks would sit at segregated lunch counters, rogue police could break down citizens' doors in midnight raids, school-children could not be taught about evolution, writers and artists could be censored at the whim of the Government, and the doors of the Federal courts would be shut on the fingers of millions of citizens." In the end, his nomination was defeated 58-42.

Reagan next nominated former Harvard Law Professor and federal Judge Douglas Ginsburg. However, Ginsburg's past marijuana use was enough to withdraw his name from consideration at that time.

Which brings us to Anthony Kennedy. In 1988, he was confirmed unanimously. In his 30 years on the bench, Kennedy was

predominantly conservative, but was a centrist by today's standards, often the swing vote in 5-4 decisions. Though he most often voted with the conservatives, he diverged in a few areas of jurisprudence and changed laws in areas including homosexual rights and abortion.

Kennedy's opinion in the 1996 case *Romer v. Evans* struck down a Colorado constitutional amendment that denied legal protection to homosexuals. His opinion in 2003's *Lawrence v. Texas* overturned prior precedent and prohibited states from banning homosexual relations.

Most recently, Kennedy provided the decisive vote in recognizing same sex marriage under the Constitution. Writing in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, Kennedy concluded:

"No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity,

devotion, sacrifice, and family. In forming a marital union, two people become something greater than once they were. As some of the petitioners in these cases demonstrate, marriage embodies a love that may endure even past death. It would misunderstand these men and women to say they disrespect the idea of marriage. Their plea is that they do respect it, respect it so deeply that they seek to find its fulfillment for themselves. Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilization's oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right."

In abortion cases, Kennedy was a reliable conservative vote, with one glaring exception. In 1992, the court took a challenge to Pennsylvania's abortion laws. This was the first such challenge since Clarence Thomas replaced civil rights icon Thurgood Marshall on the bench. Many commentators at the time predicted that the court would overturn *Roe v. Wade* and remove constitutional protection from abortion. However, this result was not to be. In a rare joint opinion, Kennedy joined Justices O'Connor and Souter in saving *Roe*. Writing that overturning *Roe* would undermine public confidence in the ability of judges to be neutral arbiters of the law, the joint opinion held that the court's very legitimacy was at stake.

These decisions will form the legacy of Anthony Kennedy's judicial career. But, they are also very much at risk given a Trump appointment. No doubt, these issues are where the battle lines will be drawn in the upcoming confirmation battle.

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