

*Darienite*

*News for Darien*

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## **Six from Darien Graduate from Sacred Heart University**

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Six Darien graduates were among more than 2,000 Sacred Heart University students receiving diplomas and words of advice and motivation this past weekend from religious leaders, scholars and classmates.

At the ceremony on Sunday, former undergraduate students, Darienites Andres Morales-Guzman, Ahmed Mustafa and Monica Sullivan received their diplomas from Sacred Heart, located in Fairfield.

Former graduate students Kelly Keating, Scott Plank and Allison Wetterauw, all from Darien, received their diplomas from the university on Saturday.

President John J. Petillo addressed undergraduate students on Sunday.

“Today is indeed your day. These past few years have slipped by so quickly. Yet in these years, friends have been made, knowledge has been shared and experiences have been afforded.”

— *an announcement from Sacred Heart University*

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Petillo told the students to always ask why and to “be uncomfortable so that as you think critically and analytically you may grow in knowledge and faith.”

Petillo ended his speech with, “Don’t try to always be normal, because you will never know how amazing you can be. Chase, reach, stretch for your dreams and hopes. Isn’t that what Pioneers do?”

The Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano, bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport, delivered the keynote address to the undergraduates. He also received an honorary Doctor of Theology degree.

“We gather here in this vast arena to celebrate your equally vast accomplishments and achievements,” Caggiano said. “You have much to celebrate and much to be proud of during these past years. You have opened your minds and hearts to discover the gifts and talents that God has given to each and every one of you.”

During his speech, Caggiano asked the graduates about leadership. “What does a true leader look like? A true leader, my friends, is a man or woman who never uses people as a means to an end, a true leader is not someone who measures success simply in terms of material possessions, a true leader never forgets a measure of a person’s heart are the principles on which that person will live.”

Theresa “T” Fletcher, class of 2017 president, took her peers down memory lane as she reflected upon her time at SHU.

“In the classroom, we were challenged in not only our subject matter, but our professors also made us think outside the box. They taught us how to think for ourselves, push ourselves and achieve things that we never thought we could. They taught us to be Pioneers and pave our own path through life.”

At the end of her speech, Fletcher wished her peers nothing but happiness and success. “I am proud to call myself a Pioneer for life.”

Shauna Santos-Dempsey, of Ludlow, Mass., received her bachelor’s degree in social work on Sunday. “I’m excited, nervous and sad,” Santos-Dempsey said about the day. The last four years presented her with many opportunities that she took advantage of including becoming a resident assistant and president of her sorority, Chi Omega. “I don’t think I would be who I am today without SHU.”

Santos-Dempsey’s aunt, Annette Plourde, said she was incredibly proud of her niece who has “been through

so much” over the last four years. Santos-Dempsey’s mom died while she was at SHU, and Plourde said she was smiling down on her daughter on Mother’s Day.

Saturday’s festivities were all about the University’s graduate students.

“In gathering today we are celebrating an accomplishment, a dream, a recognition. Each of you has spent these past months and years preparing for your future. The faculties have taught you necessary strategies and skills for your careers,” Petillo said. “As this journey ends please remember that it is character and virtues that will define you.”

Graduate student Hajrah Kashmiri, who received a master of arts in teaching degree, represented her class and shared her story and enthusiasm for the next step in her life with the crowd.

“I was born in Pakistan but pretty much raised in the U.S. However, just last year, on Nov. 4, I received my citizenship through the naturalization process. I am happy to say that after 16 years of living in the U.S., I’m finally an American,” Kashmiri said.

“Today is a very big day. But tomorrow will be even greater,” Kashmiri said. “We’re at the point in our lives where we have the privilege of doing what we love. Whether your passion is to treat patients with the best medical care or provide the most effective financial strategy to your client or to create the new breakthrough software in the industry... Whatever your passion may be, we now have the critical skills needed to tackle our challenges so that we may advance in our careers. I wish for us every success in the future.”

Stephanie Messier, of Griswold, received her master’s in occupational therapy. “It feels good,” Messier said who was accompanied by her boyfriend Joel Mason. “I’m excited to go on to the next step.”

**PHOTO CAPTION:** Theresa “T” Fletcher, Sacred Heart University class of 2017 president, celebrates following undergraduate commencement at Webster Bank Arena in Bridgeport. Fletcher addressed the crowd with a memorable speech filled with SHU memories and hopes for the future. Photo by Tracy Deer-Mirek

### ***About Sacred Heart University***

Sacred Heart University, the second-largest independent Catholic university in New England, offers more than 70 undergraduate, graduate, doctoral and certificate programs on its main campus in Fairfield and satellites in Connecticut, Luxembourg and Ireland.

More than 8,500 students attend the University’s five colleges: Arts & Sciences; Health Professions; Nursing; the Jack Welch College of Business; and the Isabelle Farrington College of Education.

The Princeton Review includes SHU in its guides *Best 381 Colleges–2017 Edition*, “Best in the Northeast” and *Best 294 Business Schools–2017 Edition*. *U.S. News & World Report* ranks SHU among the best master’s universities in the North in its “Best Colleges 2017” publication.

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*The Chronicle of Higher Education* also names SHU one of the fastest-growing Roman Catholic universities in its 2016 almanac. Sacred Heart fields 32 division I athletic teams and has an award-winning program of community service. [www.sacredheart.edu](http://www.sacredheart.edu)