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## Class of 2020 Reunites for Commencement Celebration

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*Roger Williams University*

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BRISTOL, R.I. – This weekend, RWU welcomed back and celebrated the Class of 2020 with a Commencement celebration and one-year reunion on campus, and a chance to catch up with friends and alumni.

The festivities included a reception with President Miaoulis and academic leaders inside the Dining Commons on Saturday evening, and an in-person Grad Walk and virtual Commencement celebration of the 1,100 graduates of the Class of 2020 on Sunday. The alumni were invited to stay overnight in residences at Baypoint, getting the chance to relive the experience of living, dining (with our top-rated food!) and socializing at Roger Williams.

Their senior year at RWU was unlike any other, when the Covid-19 pandemic unexpectedly forced a shift to remote operation for the final month and a half of Spring 2020. RWU rescheduled commencement to a year later, allowing the university to create a weekend of commencement celebrations that honored the Class of 2020's accomplishments throughout their Roger Williams University career and their first year as Roger Williams alumni.

“Your final year was my first year at RWU. And while it ended in ways no one could have imagined nor wanted, we made it through it together and we will forever be connected through this experience,” said RWU President Ioannis Miaoulis in his commencement address. “But your time at Roger Williams was not defined by just half of one semester. You spent countless hours learning and researching in classrooms, in laboratories, in the field and internships. You have been fearless advocates for environmental justice, for racial justice and driving real change. If that’s what you can get done while also balancing a full college workload and navigating a pandemic, we can’t wait to see what you will accomplish in the years ahead.

“Think today about how your education, the remarkable experiences and the people of Roger Williams University, have

helped you,” Miaoulis continued. “Think of this as you continue your journey, and find ways to pay that forward. Just as you did during your time at RWU, use your knowledge and your passion to make the world a better place and to care for those who do not have a voice.”

That is the kind of leadership, compassion and commitment needed to solve society’s complex problems and make the world a better place – and what their time at Roger Williams has instilled in them, Miaoulis said.

“The world needs you to think beyond yourself. A Roger Williams education is a call to do this. We need you to think about the impact of your actions on others, the impacts of a business decision on the environment, the impact of a policy on marginalized individuals,” he said. “Each choice carries significant responsibility, but you can handle it. Asking anything less of you is to diminish the importance of the roles you will play and the world needs of you. You are a Roger Williams graduate! So to you, the alumni Class of 2020, now is your time to go forth into the world with confidence and resolve and make your mark on the world.”

## Class of 2020 Commencement Celebration

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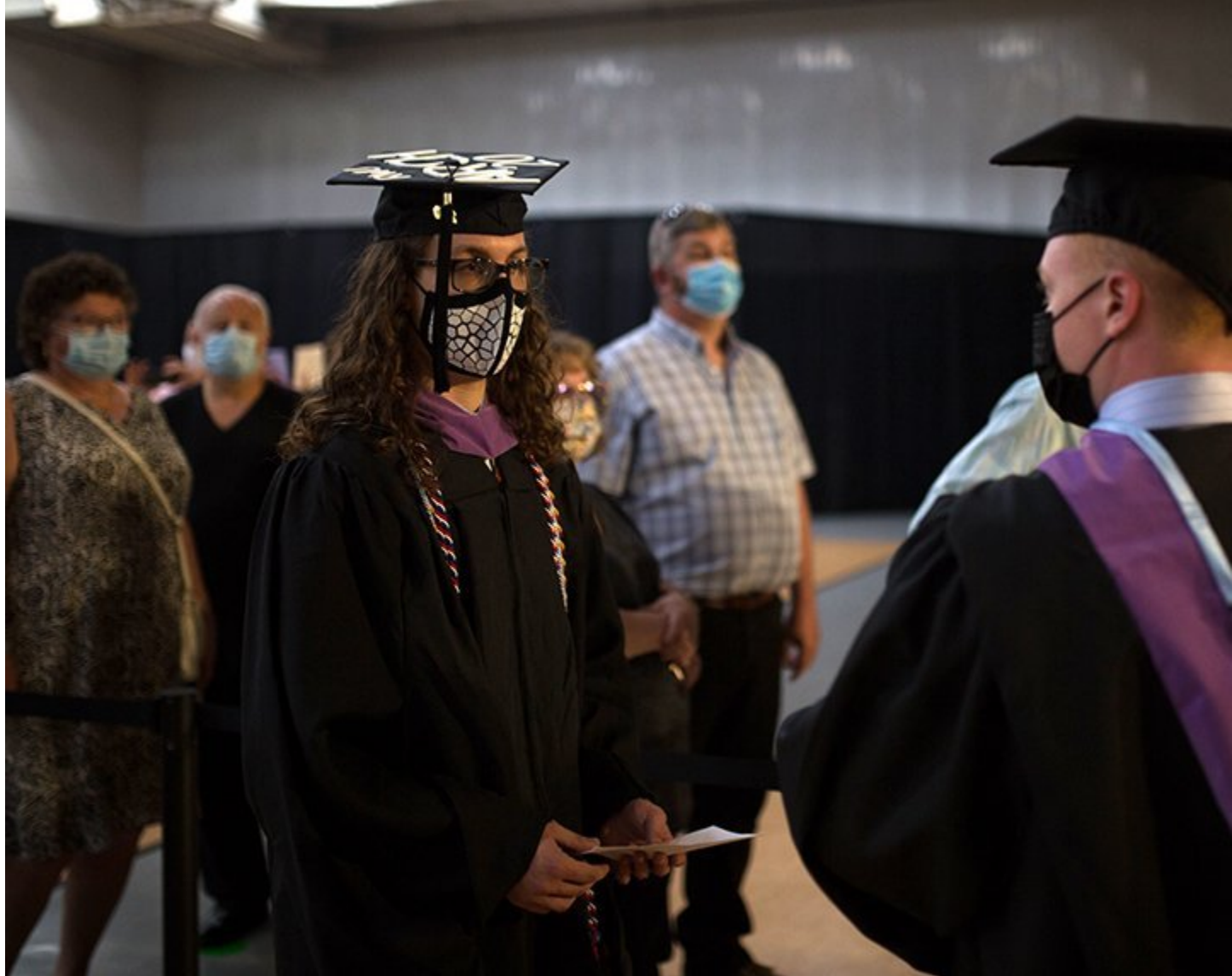
































































































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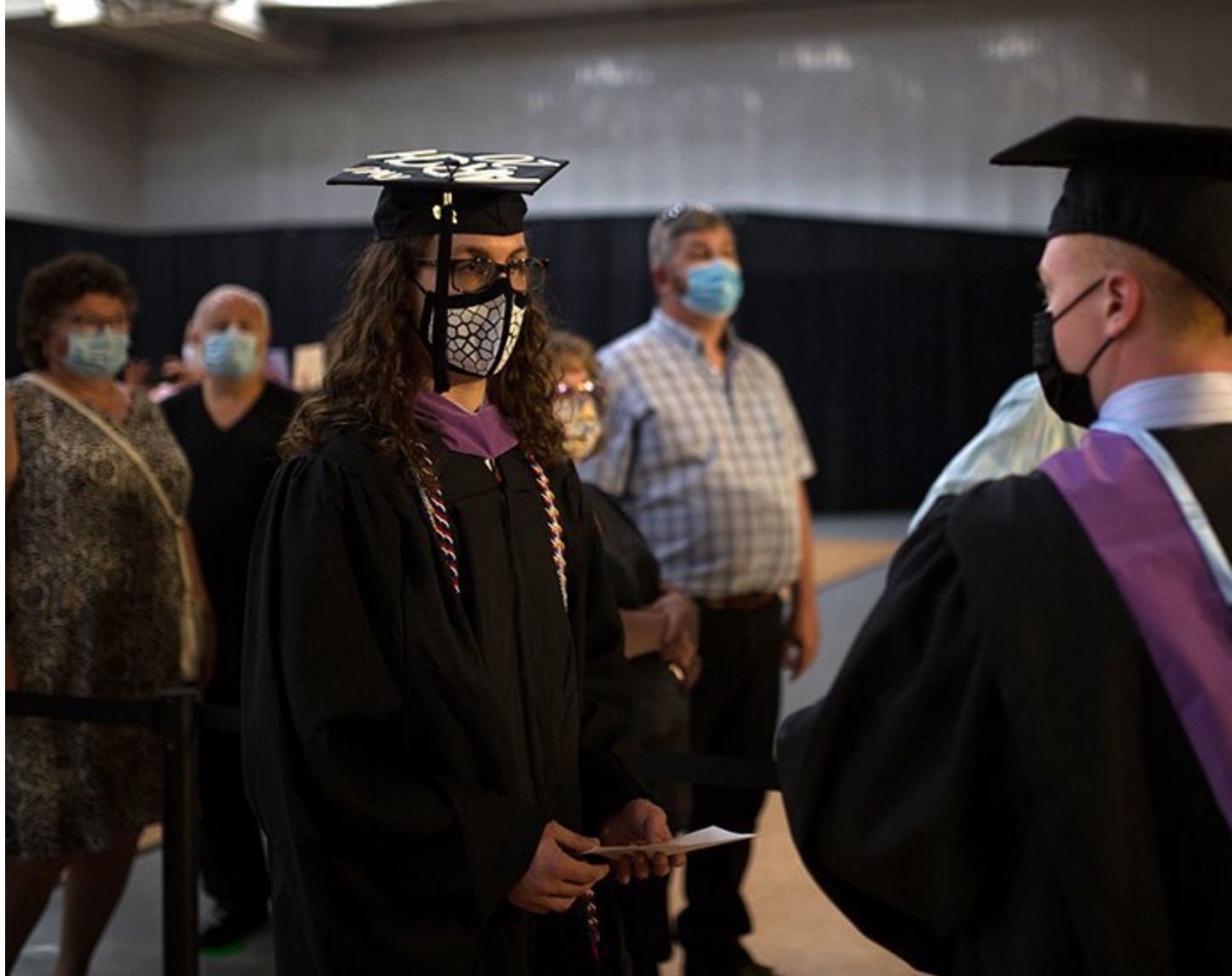






















































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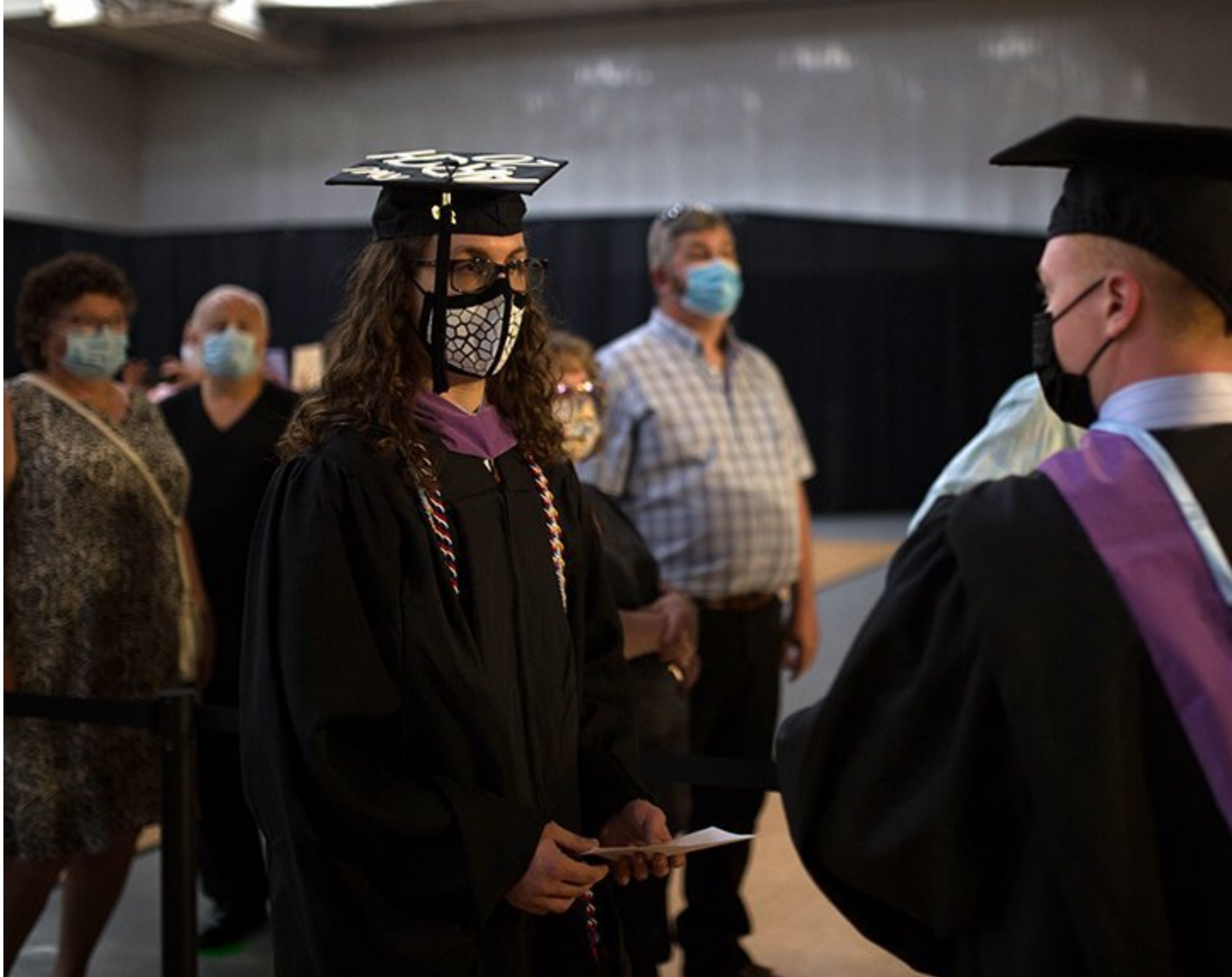












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In the keynote address, Narragansett author and educator Lorén Spears called on the Class of 2020 to confront injustice and effect change as they follow their passions and dreams.

When commencing the next part of their journey, Spears encouraged Roger Williams University graduates to ask themselves: “Have you ensured equity and justice for others? How can you be a bridge or catalyst for positive change? Can you be a mentor, role model, or create a pathway for those in our country or world that have been oppressed? ... How can you

ensure the health, well-being, equity, and justice for all through the contributions you bring to the world?”

Spears, the executive director of Tomaquag Museum, was one of two local Indigenous leaders to co-deliver the keynote address.

“Be the change,” said Spears, urging the graduates “to bring forth beauty into the world” through their careers and lives.

Sagamore William Guy, the principal chief of the Pokanoket Nation and ninth-generation great-grandson of Po Metacom, the Pokanoket leader known to the English as King Philip, also co-delivered the keynote address. He reminded graduates that they may face adversity and setbacks in reaching their goals; but, he emphasized, “Do not ever give up on your dreams.”

“Do not let fear weaken your resolve. Challenge yourself and set goals a little higher than you think you can accomplish,” said Guy, who told graduates that ever since he became Pokanoket Sachem he has worked relentlessly to create better lives for his tribal citizens. “If you do not like your chosen profession, do not be afraid to change. Every single one of you is unique, and you can do anything that you put your mind to. Dream big, welcome challenges, face fear, and embrace change.”

Timothy Baxter, a 1983 graduate of Roger Williams and former President and CEO of Samsung Electronics North America, acknowledged that their senior year, and this past year, has had its challenges, and offered his fellow alumni some advice.

“I hope you took this opportunity to build upon and take advantage of the skills that you have built during this period. Just think about the perseverance, the adaptability, your need and ability to embrace change,” said Baxter, who serves as Chairman of the RWU Board of Trustees. “I say this because as a CEO of a \$30 billion company, I know companies need people with these



skills and these competencies. You've earned those. Make that part of your value proposition. Use that to tell your story, and I think you'll be in a better place as a result of it."

Baxter urged the Class of 2020 to remain engaged with RWU and the Alumni Association, and to "stay close to the friends and the professors that really made an impact on your time here."

"Remember this," added Baxter '83 'P13 'P15 'H15, "[your] learning didn't end last May. A whole new set of learning occurred during this past year, and it will continue throughout your lives... The more you are out of your comfort zone, the more you're learning and the more you're developing; and as a result of it, you'll have even greater success."

On behalf of the 38,000-member RWU Alumni Association, Nibal Awad, Class of 2012 and Alumni Association President, told the Class of 2020 how proud she was to officially welcome them as alumni.

"Be proud of yourself. Be grateful. And if we learned anything from this year, it is to be present," Awad said. "Practice your ability to take in all your surroundings, really listen to what others are saying, take the time to connect with those in your life at a deeper level. Learn about others' struggles and hardships, and use your education, everything that you've learned from the people that make Roger Williams what it is. Take all of that and change someone's life for the better."

Take advantage of all that the Alumni Association has to offer, Awad urged, whether that is catching up with friends or networking with new professional connections at a spring or summer reception, or reaching out to get some interview coaching from a fellow alum.

“Just like your RWU campus community has supported you these last few years, your alumni community will be here for you now and moving forward,” Awad said. “We hope you’ll be there for each other and for the graduates that come after you.”