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## Law School News: Joyce And Bill Cummings Of Cummings Foundation To Deliver Keynote Address At RWU Commencement 4-20-2023

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April 20, 2023

## *Law School News*

### Joyce and Bill Cummings of Cummings Foundation to Deliver Keynote Address at RWU Commencement

Ceremony on May 19 to celebrate leaders of the built environment and leaders of racial justice, equity and inclusion in the legal and criminal justice systems. Renowned Civil Rights attorney Fred Gray to deliver keynote address at law school ceremony.

April 20, 2023 | by Jill Rodrigues '05



Bill and Joyce Cummings (left) join President Ioannis Miaoulis and his wife, Heidi Maes, at the dedication of the RWU Cummings School of Architecture last year.

BRISTOL, R.I. – Roger Williams University is celebrating leaders of the built environment and leaders of racial justice, equity and inclusion in the legal and criminal justice systems at its Commencement ceremony on May 19.

Philanthropists and real estate entrepreneurs [Joyce and Bill Cummings](#) will jointly deliver the keynote address and receive honorary degrees at RWU’s Commencement ceremony. Following the success of Bill’s commercial real estate, property management, and construction firm, Cummings Properties, he and Joyce established [Cummings Foundation](#) in 1986, to give back to the greater Boston area where the business operated and where its staff and clients lived. The Woburn-based Cummings Foundation is one of the largest private foundations in New England and has awarded more than \$450 million in grants to greater Boston nonprofits alone, giving to education, human services, healthcare and social justice. In 2022, Cummings Foundation gave Roger Williams University a gift of \$20 million – the largest in university history – launching the Cummings Institute for Real Estate through its newly rededicated Cummings School of Architecture.

Additionally, as part of the Class of 2023 university-wide ceremony, RWU will present honorary degrees to Thomas F. Gilbane Jr., chairman of the global integrated construction and facility management services firm, Gilbane Building Company, and to Michael A. Cox, Police Commissioner of the Boston Police Department. The RWU School of Law ceremony will present an honorary degree to renowned Civil Rights attorney Fred Gray, who will also deliver the keynote address, and to the Honorable Netti C. Vogel, retired Associate Justice of the Rhode Island Superior Court.

“We are thrilled to celebrate these leaders of sustainable development, construction management, racial justice, equity and inclusion, especially our partners Joyce and Bill Cummings, who continue to inspire our students with their entrepreneurial spirit and dedication to making a difference in communities locally and globally,” said RWU President Ioannis N. Miaoulis. “While they may appear to do disparate work, all of these individuals we honor at Commencement this year share an earnest commitment to caring for people and our planet. They truly embody RWU’s values by making it their personal and professional mission to create a more sustainable and just future for generations to come.”

Together, these honorary degree recipients reflect a uniquely meaningful representation of RWU’s leadership in advancing social justice and creating a more sustainable environment in which we live and work. RWU’s School of Justice Studies develops future law enforcement leaders trained in constitutional policing and procedural justice and dedicated to equity and justice for all. The RWU School of Law, the only law school in Rhode Island, recently made national headlines by requiring coursework exploring the role of race in American law, so that its graduates become leaders in shaping a more equitable and just legal system. A new interdisciplinary real estate program now augments our nationally recognized architecture and construction management programs, in collaboration with engineering, finance, investment, and other programs. These hands-on programs provide RWU students an understanding of the complexities and interdependence of problems they will be asked to solve in fields that require a level of dedication to improving communities and living sustainably with the environment.

## University Honorary Degree Recipients



Tom Gilbane, Jr. (left), chief executive officer of Gilbane, Inc. and chairman of Gilbane Company, and Michael A. Cox (right), Boston Police Commissioner, will receive honorary degrees at RWU's Commencement ceremony.

As chief executive officer of Gilbane, Inc., and chairman of Gilbane Building Company, [Tom Gilbane, Jr.](#) is the seventh family member to lead his family firm's commitment to sustainable built environments and to building a culture that ensures the highest standards on safety and ethics. He has also provided mentorship of many future generations through the ACE Mentor Program, inspiring high school students to pursue careers in architecture, construction management and engineering.

[Michal A. Cox](#) has led a distinguished career of more than 30 years in law enforcement, rising through the ranks as a Police Officer to his current appointment as Boston Police Commissioner, including his service as the Chief of the Ann Arbor Police Department. Learning from his own experiences while serving in law enforcement, Commissioner Cox has become a leading voice for improving equity and diversity in policing. His passion for justice drives his leadership in developing more effective community policing practices and building a stronger relationship between police departments and the communities they serve.

## School of Law Honorary Degree Recipients



Fred Gray, Esq., a pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement, and Netti Vogel, retired Associate Justice of the Rhode Island Superior Court, will receive honorary degrees from RWU School of Law.

A longtime Civil Rights attorney from Montgomery, Alabama, [Fred D. Gray, Esq.](#) has dedicated his career to advancing justice in the legal system. He is best known for representing Rosa Parks for refusing to give up her seat on a city bus, and he wrote the resolution that launched the Montgomery Bus Boycott. He also served as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s first civil rights attorney.

Gray played a role in numerous other pivotal moments in the Civil Rights movement. He successfully argued for student sit-ins student and filed a class-action lawsuit to enable the march from Selma to Montgomery in March 1965. His representation in *Lee v. Macon County Board of Education* and subsequent lawsuits led to the desegregation of more than 100 school systems and all the public colleges and universities in Alabama. He also famously represented the victims of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. Among his many awards and accolades, Gray received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2022.

Justice [Netti C. Vogel](#) has helped break barriers for women in the legal and judicial system during her distinguished career, serving 19 years as a civil litigator and 28 years as Associate Justice of the Rhode Island Superior Court. In the 1970s, she was the first woman handling jury trials in the private sector, and in 1980, she became the first woman to try a case before a jury while visibly pregnant. Later, she formed a successful civil litigation firm, which was the first female-headed law office in the state to represent insurance carriers. In 2009, Justice Vogel was honored by the Rhode Island Bar Association for her contributions toward advancing women in the law.

Commencement Information

On Friday, May 19, Roger Williams University will convene a university-wide Commencement celebration of the undergraduate, graduate and law students graduating in the Class of 2023, followed by individual School ceremonies throughout the morning and afternoon. The university ceremony will take place on the main athletic field. The processional steps off at 8:45 a.m. with the ceremony beginning at 9:30 a.m.

For additional Commencement details, please visit: <https://www.rwu.edu/academics/commencement>.