



May 2022
Valencia College Board of Trustees
Foundation Report

On Saturday, May 8, Valencia College hosted its 53rd annual commencement ceremony and its first in-person ceremony in two years. During the event, several historic moments took place. We celebrated more than 2,000 students from three classes: 2020, 2021, and 2022. Dr. Plinske presided for the first time as president of Valencia College, and it was the inaugural event for the Puma, the College's new mascot. Additionally, we crossed over 200,000 alumni and commemorated this moment by surprising the last student to cross the stage, Wytosia McMillan, with the announcement.

A 2022 Mary S. Collier Distinguished Graduate Finalist, Wytosia embodies the College's ideals. She was born in Sanford, but the family moved frequently and both parents battled health issues. She was never able to attend any of her previous graduation ceremonies. She enrolled at Valencia College right after high school and quickly caught the attention of Criminal Justice Professor Lauren Sykes '89. A bright and rising star student, Wytosia soon found herself choosing between attending college or caring for her mother, whose health was declining and who had been placed in hospice. This responsibility weighed heavily on Wytosia, the youngest of seven children and the only one at home, and she put her education on hold for a few years.

Wytosia was able to return to Valencia College with the assistance of Professor Sykes and a Go Fund Me campaign aimed at helping her pay the \$1,800 owed to the College after she dropped out. On May 8, Wytosia graduated with honors and an A.S. in Criminal Justice. Wytosia finally attended one of her graduations, but with no living parents and no family in attendance. As the announcement was made, the arena erupted with cheers, making for a memorable and special occasion. Wytosia will transfer to Valencia College's BAS-BOL program in the fall. To read Wytosia's complete story, go to <http://news.valenciacollege.edu/featured/valencia-college-celebrates-20000th-alumnus-and-how-she-overcame-many-obstacles/>.

We also celebrated the 41st Mary S. Collier Distinguished Graduate, Leah Basaria. In her speech, Leah shared how she dropped out of school 20 years ago and came to Valencia College after a family tragedy that changed the direction of her life. Once at the college, Leah became an honors student and won several research and student-of-the-year awards. A non-traditional

student, both married and a mother to a 9-year-old, Leah stayed busy on campus working as a student CARE coach to help students and as an assistant to New Student Experience instructors and psychology professors. Leah was also recently named a Jack Kent Cooke Scholar and will transfer to UCF Burnett Honors College in the fall. Read more about Leah and her inspiring story here: <http://thegrove.valenciacollege.edu/turning-tragedy-into-triumph-distinguished-graduate-chooses-a-career-path-to-help-others/>.

For these special moments, Foundation Board member and Distinguished Alumna Linh Dang '90 introduced the 2022 Distinguished Graduate and welcomed Wytosia, our 200,000th alumna, to the Valencia College alumni family. She also shook hands with and congratulated over 1,000 students during the afternoon ceremony.

At the end of each ceremony, graduates were presented with the very first Puma mascot gift, a special commemorative item to remember their time at Valencia College.