

Column: Southside Strong

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First Virtual Graduation

By Quentin R. Johnson, Ph.D.

Southside Virginia Community College will celebrate its 2020 graduates during the institution's first ever virtual graduation ceremony. The event will recognize the excellence of our students and honor faculty and staff commitments in support of student success. Students, parents, families, and community members can tune in from the convenience of their own homes beginning Saturday morning, June 20 at 9:30 a.m. The prerecorded video can be viewed at any time after its release on the college's website (southside.edu), through its FaceBook page, and on YouTube.

It has been a year of firsts at SVCC. The 2020 graduating class completed their programs during the first world-wide pandemic in modern times. The virtual graduation ceremony honoring their accomplishments is my first commencement as the college's President. In addition, SVCC itself is celebrating an anniversary marking its first 50 years of providing educational services to the community. As a commemoration of this anniversary, a time capsule, which will include a copy of the unique 2020 commencement ceremony, will be placed at a campus location.

I am very proud of SVCC's students, faculty, and staff. They have really pulled together during the past semester's unusual journey. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has changed many aspects of our lives, it has not altered the excitement and enthusiasm we feel about what our graduates have accomplished.

Serving as Faculty Marshal, Dr. Lisa Jordan, Professor of History and Political Science, will open the virtual ceremony. Dr. Michelle Edmonds, Dean of Nursing, Allied Health and Natural Science, will sing the national anthem. Speakers will include Mr. J. Wesley Shepherd, Chairperson of the Local Board and representatives from our college community.

Dr. Keith Harkins, Vice-President of Workforce and Interim Vice-President of Academic Affairs, will have the privilege of bestowing special honors and commendations. Munimah Fulani will receive the Florence Daniel Riepe Kalbacker Leadership and Community Service Award, which is presented annually to a student who embodies the ideals and spirit requisite for community advancement. Harkins will also acknowledge members of the Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society, an organization of scholars that encourages high-achievement among community college students. Other honorees include participants in the Women in Search of Excellence (WISE) Mentoring Program, the Make-It-Happen Program providing support for

minority male students, the Student Ambassador Program encouraging emerging student leaders, and the Dual Enrollment partnership with public school systems permitting students to earn high school and college credit at the same time.

The highlight of the ceremony, of course, will be the more than 870 graduates who make up the Class of 2020. Submitted photographs will be displayed as their names are announced. Dr. Dixie Dalton, Dean of Humanities, Social Sciences and Business, Dr. Chad Patton, Dean of Career and Occupational Technology and Dr. Michele Edmonds, Dean of Nursing, Allied Health and Natural Sciences will recognize the individual graduates.

I am so very proud of SVCC's graduates. They have risen to the occasion and surpassed expectations. Many grappled with and overcame tremendous obstacles to earn their degrees, certificates, and diplomas. A graduation ceremony acknowledges these many accomplishments, and I encourage each student to move forward with a commitment to be change agents that help make our communities, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and this world a better place. Go forth and make a contribution, make a difference. The future belongs to you.

Dr. Quentin R. Johnson is president of Southside Virginia Community College, an institution of higher learning that provides a wide variety of education opportunities to a diverse student population within a service area that spans ten counties and the City of Emporia. He can be reached via email at quentin.johnson@southside.edu.

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