



Shonda Schilling delivered this year's commencement address.

College's 56th Commencement Celebrates Success

By Marie DeMarco

Four hundred and six Merrimack College students, including six international students, received their diplomas and became Merrimack alumni at the college's 56th commencement on Sunday, May 21. More than 5,000 family and friends, as well as devoted faculty, filled the Volpe Center to witness this milestone in the lives of the graduates.

Eight master of education degrees, 220 bachelor of arts, 229 bachelor of science, and three associate degrees were conferred.

Philanthropist Shonda Schilling, the commencement speaker, received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from the college. After comparing the anticipation of commencement with the anticipation of a World Series game, Schilling spoke of two things she wanted the graduates to remember:

- Life is not what you accomplish; it is what you overcome,
- Tough times don't last; tough people do.

These are words she has come to live by since facing several health scares in her young life. At 31, she was diagnosed with a rare blood disorder; at 32, a thyroid disease; but the day that changed her life, she said, was when she was diagnosed with malignant melanoma at 33.

"That day changed who I was and who I was to become," said Schilling. It was at that point she developed the SHADE foundation, a non-profit organization that teaches people how to live healthier and about the dangers of sun exposure. Shonda and her husband, Curt, of the Boston Red Sox, have also worked tirelessly to raise money and awareness for ALS (Lou Gherig's Disease). She told the graduates that ALS has taught her to not take anything for granted.

"I make choices in my life because I believe there is a higher power and one day I will answer to that power," she declared. "I strongly believe that we are put on this earth to take care of one another. Don't believe for one second that the actions you choose, no matter how big or small, won't have an impact on others."

She shared many words of advice with the graduates, including one of her favorites: "What we do for ourselves will die with us; what we do for others lives on." She encouraged them to "walk out of here knowing that there isn't anything you can't accomplish and you will change the world. You will do something greater than the rest and you can look back and know the world is better because you lived in it. I hope you all go out and do amazing things."