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Georgia Southern University Celebrates Largest-Ever Graduation

MAY 8, 2010

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More than 20,000 people packed into Georgia Southern University's Paulson Stadium on May 8 to honor a record number of graduates at Spring Commencement. Approximately 2,400 graduates participated in the ceremony.

New Georgia Southern President Brooks Keel, who took office in January, served as the speaker at the event. 'This is the largest graduating class we have ever had, and one of the best classes we have ever had. I believe this is a sign of what the future holds for Georgia Southern,' he said. 'I don't know who is more excited, me or the graduates. This is my first graduation and I have been looking forward to this since day one.'

The honorees included Sara Plasphol, the first graduate in the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health's Doctor of Public Health program. The first doctoral graduate is a key step as the JPHCOPH continues the process to earn accreditation from the Council on Education for Public Health. 'Even though I'm the first one, I feel like I'm sharing it with my DrPH cohorts who are right behind me. I feel like my colleagues are the trailblazers for a program that is going to continue to grow,' said Plasphol, who took classes full-time while working full-time as the research ethics officer at Memorial Health University Medical Center.

Along with the 'traditional' graduates, Georgia Southern recognized 153 fully and 63 partially online graduates, the most ever for the University. One of them, Canadian resident Derek Rice, earned his degree entirely online while living in Ontario and made his first-ever trip to Georgia for his graduation.

Rice was the first graduate in the College of Business Administration's online Master of Science in Applied Economics program. 'I researched degrees in economics taught at a distance and was really interested in this one. The concentration in regional economic development was what attracted me because I can actually use that in the work I do,' said Rice, who works for an accounting office that does economic development consulting.

An addition to Spring Commencement this year was recognition of the University's newly-commissioned ROTC cadets. Another highlight came at the end of the ceremony as Freedom, the bald eagle that flies at Georgia Southern home football games, made his second flight at graduation.

Keel provided graduates with memorable advice saying, 'Never, ever forget that you are an eagle. Your colors are true blue and white and this will always be your house.'

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