



Speaker Kristen Grimm Tells Stockton Graduates: ‘Stand Up to Hate’

Morning Ceremony First of Two at College on Saturday, May 11

For Immediate Release; link to photos and grad list at end

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Galloway Township, NJ- Kristen Grimm, president and founder of Spitfire Strategies, a leading national public relations firm that helps foundations and nonprofits create positive social change, spoke to 650 graduates plus families, friends and faculty at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey’s Baccalaureate ceremony on Saturday morning.

The commencement was one of two ceremonies held at the college Saturday, May 11, in which a total of more than 1300 members of the Class of 2013 graduated. Degrees for the Schools of Arts and Humanities, Business, Education, General Studies and Health Sciences were conferred in the morning.

Grimm told the graduates she’d seen some mortarboards with “Now What?” written on top.

“Yes, you have a college degree, and doors will open to you....But can you have it all? That’s the wrong question.”

Grimm said the graduates can’t have it all, and recommended that they make “a bucket list” for things they want to do before they’re 30.

Some things are better to do in your 20s, she said – like “start a band” or “take an ancient VW bug on a trip through South America.”

The kind of things that might mean sleeping on a floor, like travel adventures or even volunteering for a political campaign for little or no money – are best done in your 20s,
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Grimm said.

She advised them to find their passion.

“Don’t spend time on stuff you feel “eh” about,” Grimm said. She noted that her father wasn’t happy when she decided not to go to law school after having been accepted. But she realized it wasn’t really what she wanted to do – thinking about law school was “just a habit” left over from her childhood.

Instead, she worked at a mall on weekends so she could intern at a public relations firm that advocated for human rights. Eventually she became the head of the firm, but by then, “I wanted to start my own company.”

After 10 years, Spitfire Strategies has 40 employees, for whom she provides benefits even though firms with fewer than 50 workers are not required to do so, she said.

Grimm said she was asked to testify before Congress on the issue of small businesses providing employee benefits and some members were amazed at what she was doing.

“I do not get my values from the federal government,” she said. “I know what is right.”

“If you can make America cleaner – do it,” she tol

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to be here and hope for the future,” President Saatkamp said. “But I am going to introduce a serious concern in this celebratory setting that I hope will be received as a challenge.”

“Here is an important message to our graduates: having a college degree is not enough,” President Saatkamp said. “Having a college degree gets you a long way because you have the ability to continue to learn and the likelihood of living well.

“Even so, there are no guarantees,” he said. “What is ahead of you is the delight of moving forward into a new life but it also includes persistence, diligence, hard work, and the task of getting along with others who may be different from you in a cosmopolitan world.”

“Our future depends on you continuing to work on building communities of respect and honor.”

The valedictorian at Saturday morning’s Baccalaureate commencement, Lynn Abrahamsen, of Jackson, Ocean County, graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Speech-Language Pathology and a minor in Spanish. She will be attending Kean University for a Master’s in Speech-Language Pathology in the fall.

Abrahamsen invoked her major in talking about the importance of story-telling: “Today, I would like to assert that stories are the foundation of communication and they help us build relationships, preserve the past, and learn from the experiences of others.”

“A compelling story has the power not only to inform but to persuade, evoke strong emotion, and build connections with others,” Abrahamsen said. “It also enables us to reflect upon life’s most memorable moments and consider what is truly important. In fact, it is the need to help people tell their own stories that first attracted me to the field of speech pathology.”

“Graduates, what moments at Stockton will you remember?” she asked. “As you graduate today, treasure your college stories and learn from the stories of others, but more importantly, *use* them to teach, persuade, inspire, and grow in your personal and professional endeavors,” Abrahamsen said.

Kathryn Baker of Stokesdale, N.C. was the salutatorian for Saturday’s morning Commencement.

Baker majored in French with minors in International Studies and Political Science. She will be teaching English in China with the Ameson Foundation’s Ameson Year in China program later this year.

Keynote speaker Grimm also received the college’s Distinguished Service award, presented by Trustee Madeleine Deininger, Class of 1980.

In recommending the award, President Saatkamp noted that among her many accomplishments, “Ms. Grimm is the author of “Now Hear This: The Nine Laws of
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