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Serve others, Shaw says

Monday, May 10, 2004

By Nancy Buczek
Staff writer

Syracuse University Chancellor Kenneth "Buzz" Shaw told thousands of graduates Sunday that they share a bond with him: Both are embarking on a new phase.

Shaw, SU chancellor and president for 13 years, is retiring in July and plans to take a year off before returning to SU to teach leadership.

"We, you and I, are going through a major transition," Shaw told the crowd of 16,652 people. "Changes, even good changes, are rarely easy and often stressful."

Sunday, there were 5,243 degree candidates in a joint commencement at the Carrier Dome for SU and the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry, and about 3,500 graduates showed up. It was SU's 150th commencement and SUNY ESF's 107th.

SU delayed the ceremony about 20 minutes to give family members a chance to get through congested traffic around the Dome.

Kevin Morrow, an SU spokesman, attributed the delay to rain and out-of-town drivers. He said SU has delayed the ceremony in the past if it appeared many people were late.

Shaw, who will assume the title chancellor emeritus when he retires, told the graduates to remember their successes and failures because those experiences are their greatest teachers. He also advised staying in touch with loved ones and committing to something other than themselves.

"I strongly encourage you to find ways to serve others," Shaw said.

Shaw and his wife, Associate of the Chancellor Mary Ann Shaw, stressed

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community service during their tenure with SU. Shortly after their arrival in 1991, the university opened its Center for Public and Community Service, which coordinates student volunteer activities.

Actress Phylicia Rashad gave the commencement address, which lasted about six minutes. Last year's speaker, former President Bill Clinton, spoke for about 25 minutes.

"It was definitely a bit on the short side, but I think she made some good points," Morrow said.

Rashad is known for her role as Clair Huxtable, the wife of Bill Cosby's Cliff Huxtable on NBC's "The Cosby Show," which aired from 1984 to 1992. She is now starring in a Broadway production of "A Raisin in the Sun." She left Syracuse shortly after commencement because she had a performance Sunday night, Morrow said.

Rashad was recently named the best TV mom and the "TV mom closest to your own in spirit" by the Opinion Research Corp. The survey was based on the responses of 720 adults who have a living mother or mother-in-law.

The ranking was timely since Sunday was Mother's Day, making the event, and Rashad's appearance, extra special for some mothers in the audience.

Rashad told the graduates that as they enter the world, they should strive to reflect the characteristics of a mother's heart. She said a mother's heart is brave, keenly intelligent, resourceful, flexible, quick and skilled in action. Its sole intention is "to see the family through," and she noted that a mother will sacrifice her own pleasure for the well-being of her family.

"I loved it," Deborah Belleau said of Rashad's speech.

Belleau's daughter, Jacqui, 22, graduated with a bachelor's degree in industrial design, a five-year program at SU's College of Visual and Performing Arts.

Belleau was one of 19 graduates from the program at the ceremony, each with white paper letters attached to the back of their black graduation gown spelling out their nickname. Belleau's was Jaybee for her initials. The top of their mortarboards each had a number, 1 to 19, to recognize that 19 of them were graduating, said Belleau, of Hamilton, Mass.

Rosalie Nelson, of Charleston, S.C., said she was glad SU held commencement on Mother's Day. Her daughter, Leonese Nelson, 33, graduated from SU Sunday with a doctorate in political science.

"That's my Mother's Day present," Nelson said.

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