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ON YOUR EYES WHEN
YOUR IMAGINATION
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—NJIT President Robert A. Altenkirch

Left: New Jersey Lieutenant Governor
Kim Guadagno and NJIT President
Robert A. Altenkirch



COMMENCEMENT 2010

“REACH AS YOU RISE.”

—New Jersey Lieutenant Governor Kim Guadagno



On May 17, at NJIT’s 2010 commencement, New Jersey Lieutenant Governor Kim Guadagno endorsed the value of embracing the unexpected in life, and NJIT President Robert A. Altenkirch urged the graduating class to always retain the imagination and wonder that lead to great accomplishments.

Guadagno, who began her public career as a federal prosecutor, was the 75th sheriff of Monmouth County and the county’s first woman sheriff. She is also New Jersey’s first lieutenant governor.

NJIT awarded 2,237 degrees to the Class of 2010, which Guadagno addressed as the keynote speaker at the Prudential Center in Newark. Guadagno received an honorary doctorate of humane letters. Energy-industry leader Ralph Izzo and medical pioneer Leon Smith were also awarded honorary doctorates.

SIX “SIMPLE” RULES

“Love what you do” but “stay open to surprises,” Guadagno said. “If anyone ever told me when I was your age that I would be a sheriff or lieutenant governor some day, I never would have believed them.”

Guadagno, who said that the primary goal of her speech was to be “quick, since it’s only me who stands between you and your diploma,” advised students to follow six simple life rules. “First and foremost, do what you love. Everything else will fall in place.” Number two was always to expect the unexpected with its corollary rule, number three – to make sure you have a backup plan.

“Take that long shot,” she also advised, discussing her own life and how opportunities arose like the recent election for lieutenant governor. “My shot was running for an office no one ever heard of,” she said.

Number five focused on humility. “Learn from your failures,” she remarked, “and make

sure you always move forward afterward.”

Her last piece of advice was don’t fear ambition. “Reach as you rise,” she urged. “Take the opportunities as they come along. And stay in New Jersey!”

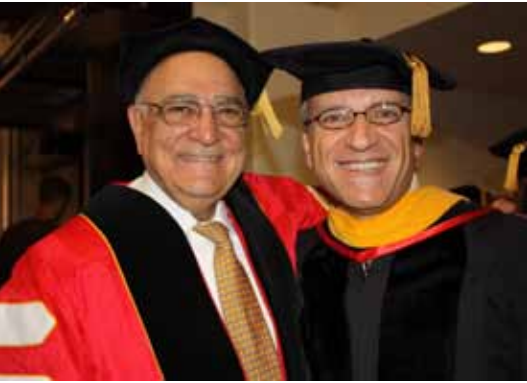
SERVICE TO INDUSTRY AND THE NATION

Ralph Izzo, PhD, chairman of the board, president and chief executive officer of Public Service Enterprise Group Incorporated (PSEG), received an honorary doctor of science degree. Since joining Public Service Electric and Gas in 1992, Izzo has served in various executive positions within PSEG’s family of companies.

Izzo is a well known leader within the utility industry, as well as the public policy arena. His public-policy experience includes service as an American Physical Society Congressional Science Fellow in the office of former U.S. Senator Bill Bradley. He also served four years

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Top: Leon Smith (left), who received an honorary doctor of science degree, with Fadi Deek, dean of the College of Science and Liberal Arts.

Above: Ralph Izzo receiving the hood for his honorary doctor of science degree from NJIT Trustee Stephen P. DePalma '72.

as a senior policy advisor in the office of former New Jersey Governor Thomas H. Kean, specializing in energy, science and technology.

Izzo's career began as a research scientist at the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory, performing numerical simulations of fusion energy experiments. He has published or presented over 35 papers on magnetohydrodynamic modeling.

PIONEERING ACTION AGAINST DISEASE

Leon Smith, MD, an early AIDS activist, was also awarded an honorary doctor of science degree. Smith developed the first viral diagnostic laboratory in New Jersey as well as HIV and hepatitis C clinics at Saint Michael's Medical Center, Newark, where he still practices. The "go-to" doctor for mystery diseases, he was chief of infectious diseases at Saint Michael's before becoming chair of the hospital's department of medicine.

In 1979, Smith identified New Jersey's first AIDS cases and worked with Saint Michael's to establish the state's first AIDS clinic. Although people were initially reluctant to work there, the clinic was eventually able to treat 50 people daily, a roster that grew to more than 5,000 patients. "That was before we had good therapy," says Smith. "Today the drugs are so good, it's easier to treat AIDS than diabetes." Smith is also actively involved with the Leon Smith Foundation, which is dedicated to combating AIDS in Africa.

SEEING WITH IMAGINATION

NJIT President Robert A. Altenkirch advocated an imaginative and creative perspective on the world, quoting Mark Twain who cautioned that "You can't depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus." Looking back over the past hundred years or so, Altenkirch said, one finds many surprising pronouncements by intelligent, educated individuals whose imagination was blurred. "They couldn't accept the feasibility or foresee the potential of scientific and technological advances that others did."

Altenkirch gave the example of renowned

mathematician and physicist Lord Kelvin, who asserted the impossibility of heavier-than-air flying machines fewer than ten years before the Wright Brothers' first flight in 1903. In 1946, Altenkirch went on to say, famed movie-producer Darryl Zanuck stated, "Television won't be able to hold on to any market it captures after the first six months." And he cited the ironically confident 1977 statement by the founder of the mainframe computer manufacturer Digital Equipment Corporation that "There is no reason why anyone would want a computer in their home."

But others looked ahead to different futures, Altenkirch continued, and offered a different message that merits special attention today. One such individual was the pioneering chemist Sir Humphry Davy, a close friend of the poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose perspective on the future was poetic as well as that of a clear-eyed scientist. Early in the 19th century, Davy wrote, "Nothing is so fatal to the progress of the human mind as to suppose our views of science are ultimate; that there are no mysteries



in nature; that our triumphs are complete; and that there are no new worlds to conquer."

"Whatever paths you follow as graduates of NJIT," Altenkirch projected, "I know that you will always be among those who understand that accomplishments in the present are never ultimate, never end points. We know that your capacity to marvel at the mysteries of the world around us will not diminish, and that you will persist in seeking to change the world in ways that are both exciting and positive." ■