

'BRAVO, WELL DONE'



Paul Guilloffe

Southern Vermont College's Class of 2012 poses on the base of the Cascade for the class photo.

SVC celebrates an (unusual) perfect day

ZEKE WRIGHT
Staff Writer

BENNINGTON — Graduating Southern Vermont College students enjoyed a picturesque commencement atop the hill and received some parting advice before moving their mortarboard tassels from right to left.

"We're here today to say, 'Bravo, well done,'" opened Deborah Wiley, president of the college's Board of Trustees. Citing a "long-standing tradition" of precipitation on graduation, Wiley apologized for Saturday's sunny skies. Another departure from recent years past would be acting President James E. Beckwith's participation in the ceremonies — President Karen Gross, on a one-year leave of absence while serving as a senior policy advisor to the U.S. Department of Education, attended but remained a seated spectator for the ceremony.

Beckwith told the 127 graduating students that they had witnessed substantial change at SVC, including improvements to



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Graduating students move their mortarboard tassels from right to left during the Southern Vermont College Commencement.

the physical campus, and the expansion of classes to the downtown. Describing his own evolving relationship with the college, from a professor and chief operating officer to acting president, Beckwith said he surmised a lot had changed in the lives of students as well. "Life is an ever-morphing process," he said. "Don't let change get you down. ... Harness it."

A writer, commentator, and bioethicist, Dr. Ruth Levy Guyer was Saturday's honorary degree recipient and commencement speaker. Guyer said she had come to think about life as an "ongoing series of puzzles and problems."

"All through college, we are asked to solve problems of various kinds. But what's different on the day after graduation is that there is no professor telling you, 'You got the right answer.'" In graduate school — and life — Guyer said she discovered the puzzles she faced were "all new,"

and up to her to figure out. She said "learning how to learn" was then a key component of the college experience.

"Facts and details and specifics are important, but what really has always served me the most was understanding creativity, the process of learning; ways to approach new situations, analyze puzzles, and solve problems."

Bioethical dilemmas

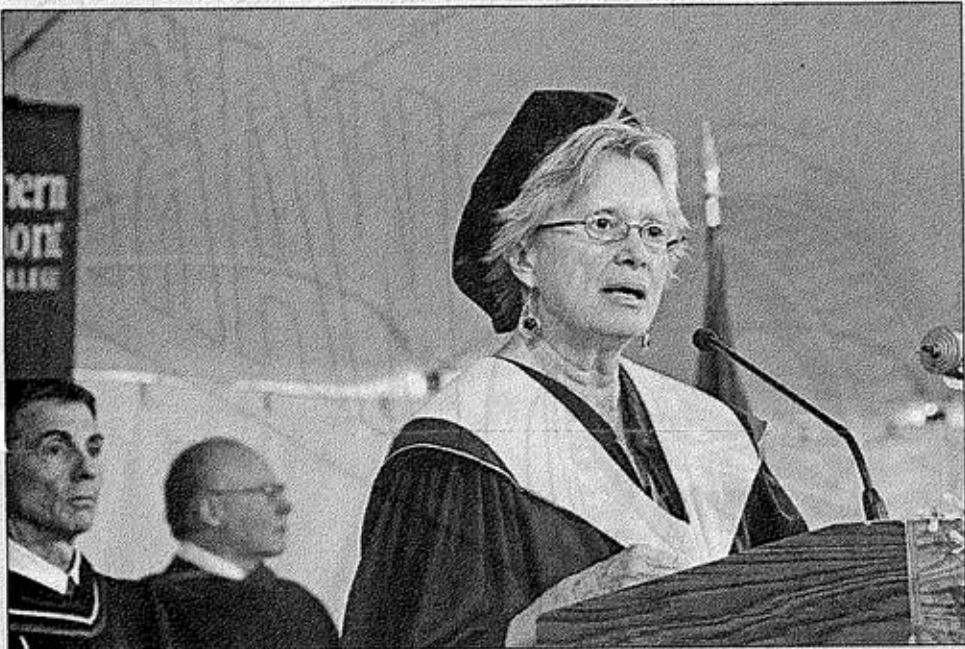
Guyer illustrated the point with bioethical dilemmas — puzzles which often have no one right answer, she said, but rather several equally good (or bad) solutions. She pointed to organ shortages and transplantation, patients kept alive solely by respirator, and the effects of advances in neonatal care which have allowed babies born "very sick or much too early" to survive.

"Some of these babies did really well, thanks to new technologies," said Guyer, speaking of case histories contained in her first book, "Baby at Risk."

"But, for some, the rescue technologies proved to be halfway technologies," which she described as only getting people "halfway back" to where they

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Honorary degree recipient and commencement speaker Dr. Ruth Levy Guyer.

SVC grads enjoy rare sunshine

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need to be to live substantive lives. Guyer said journalists who reported on "tiny babies" failed to follow-up years later. "More often than not, these babies were not doing well." She said her book was an attempt to explain that "not every teeny tiny baby could go on to lead a healthy life."

"We needed to start talking about the 'should' questions in the context of sick babies," she said. A difficult discussion, but an important one, Guyer said she was gratified her work led to that discussion, with nursing and medical groups, ethics committees, and community groups.

"So, what problems are you going to attack?" she asked graduates. "The task ahead of you is really to figure out what engages you the most, and head in that

direction. Keep your eyes open, keep your brain active, and find out what you love to do. Spend your time doing work that is worth doing, that will leave the world a lot better — or even just a little bit better — that will make it more fair and more just."

"And, if what you are doing turns out not to be right for you, move on."

Associate degree class speaker Gabrielle Ellen Remillard said students were focused on goals, and learned by achieving those goals. "When we apply the knowledge we learn ... (that) fulfills our full potential."

Baccalaureate degree class speaker Tyler Norman Morton spoke to the formative process of his college years. "The person standing before you today is not someone I knew existed," he said.

Valedictorian and salutatorian for associate degree candidates were John Percey Andrews and Kristina Marie Reynolds, respectively. Andrea J. Stoddard was valedictorian and Jocelyn Nicole Donlon was salutatorian for baccalaureate degree candidates.

A number of graduating students were presented with awards for personal growth, their contributions to SVC, and for best exemplifying the fulfillment of the college's mission. Allan M. Faxon, Jr., class of 1981, received the distinguished alumni award, which was accepted on his behalf by his wife, Nancy Faxon, class of 1980. "Go out there and make it happen," she told graduates. "Don't listen to the naysayers."

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