

Commencement means forging the future

Commencement is a ceremony in which degrees or diplomas are conferred on graduating students or a beginning – we experienced both meanings of the word in Williamsburg this past weekend.

William & Mary held a virtual commencement on May 16 and conferred degrees on 2,684 undergraduates, graduate and professional students including a member of our City Council who received his law degree. Our local schools will soon hold their own graduation ceremonies to honor the students and their families who've worked so hard to enter this new phase of their lives.

No one could have foreseen that a pandemic would rob the Class of 2020 of the academic traditions to celebrate their momentous accomplishments. Instead of being together in Williamsburg, classmates and friends were dispersed far and wide. Even as challenges arose, character traits common in the "Tribe" were on exhibition by students at all academic levels: acceptance, compassion, resourcefulness, innovation and resilience. Readers may view the heartfelt and inspiring W&M ceremony on the university's webpage (www.wm.edu). It ended with lyrics we can all embrace: *"Life is always better when we're together."*

And "together in person" is a new beginning for Williamsburg residents and high school graduates as businesses gradually re-open in accordance with the Governor's Phase I guidelines. As we enter this new stage, we must remember the silent, invisible threat of COVID-19 is still present and not let down our guard. It's our individual responsibility to accept, embrace and find joy in the moments we do have together.

We can reconnect with friends and maintain physical distance; we can show our happiness at seeing someone through a "wave" instead of a handshake or a hug. We can have meaningful conversations while gathering in groups less than 10. We can smile with our eyes while wearing a face covering. At this point, re-opening is a privilege that we need to protect. The coronavirus is still extremely dangerous and a major reoccurrence of COVID-19 cases can move us from "Safer at Home" back to "Stay at Home".

While this may dampen celebrations for all of our graduates, we know that the coronavirus pandemic has brought shared sacrifices for all of our residents. Williamsburg's strength continues to shine in each and every one of us who calls the city home.

As re-opening phases occur, we ask you to abide by the guidelines with patience as the procedures are in place to keep us safe. Please be mindful of the conditions applied to establishments in terms of limited capacity, social distancing cleaning and for many a new way of management. This applies to salons and barbershops as well and their new requirements for operation. They want to take care of their customers but it's important to do so carefully. If businesses and restaurants don't implement the mandatory requirements, they will be closed, thus kind and polite cooperation of the public is vital.

Even with businesses re-opening, there are still many financial challenges ahead for the owners and employees. If you are able to invest in funds to assist, such as at the Williamsburg Community Foundation, please do so. We thank you for your continued diligence against the coronavirus and for following the Governor's Phase I guidelines so we can move quickly to the next phase of re-opening.



CITY OF WILLIAMSBURG

A MESSAGE OF

Hope

FROM WILLIAMSBURG CITY COUNCIL

Williamsburg City Council

Paul Freiling

Doug Pons

Ted Maslin

Barbara Ramsey

Benny Zhang