

Commencement speaker survived genocide

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the atrocities which occurred in Rwanda as more than a half million people were killed over a 100-day period during a civil unrest between Hutu and Tutsi factions.

This year's Commencement speaker, Immaculée Ilibagiza, experienced first-hand the Rwandan Genocide. Her life was forever transformed as she and seven other women spent 91 days huddled silently together in the cramped bathroom of a local pastor's house. She entered the bathroom a vibrant, 115-pound university student with a loving family, only to emerge weighing 65 pounds and finding her entire family had been brutally murdered with the exception of one brother who had been studying out of the country.

Ilibagiza became a best-selling author when she put her story down on paper in her first book, Left to Tell; Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust. It quickly climbed New York Times' Best Seller list in 2006 and has been translated into 15 languages worldwide. Her story has also been made into a documentary titled The Diary of Immaculée.

Ilibagiza credits her salvation to prayer and faith. She says through prayer, she eventually found the strength to forgive her tormentors and her family's murderers.

During her time in hiding, Ilibagiza taught herself English with the use of The Bible and a dictionary. Once she escaped to safety, she secured a job with the United Nations.

Ilibagiza immigrated to the United States in 1998 where she continues her work with the UN.

She has been on 60 Minutes, CNN, and The Aljazeera Network, along with appearing in The New York Times, USA Today, Newsday, and many other domestic and international outlets. Her latest book, Led By Faith: Rising from the Ashes of the Rwandan Genocide, was release in September 2008.

Today Ilibagiza is regarded as one of world's leading speakers on peace, faith, and forgiveness. She works to spread her message and to raise



Immaculée Ilibagiza 2009 Commencement Speaker

money for her Left to Tell Charitable Fund, which directly benefits the children orphaned by the genocide.

Sure sign of Spring - Sneaker Angels return

Sneaker Angels are back as the College prepares for the 12th annual Ted Moore Run/Walk. This year's event will be held Saturday, May 2, beginning at 9:00 a.m. in front of the gymnasium.

They are still just \$2 with portions of the proceeds going toward programs that educate against drinking and driving, and the Ted Moore Scholarship Fund.

Sneaker Angels can be purchased from Bev Hertline in the Business Office, through Sodexo in the Snack Bar and Dining Hall, the Institutional Advancement Office on the third floor of Payne Hall, and on the Rome Campus from Sue Halbritter.

Also next week, Sneaker Angels will be sold on Tuesday, April 14, from 10:00 a.m. through 2:00 p.m. in the lobby of the Academic Building, and on Thursday, April 16, from 11:00 a.m. through 2:00 p.m. in the lobby of Payne Hall.

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Halpin receives 2009 Gold Scholar award

Robert Halpin is a quiet and unassuming person, but his actions speak volumes for his character. Mr. Halpin was re-

cently recognized for his accomplishments when he was selected as a 2009 Coca Cola Gold Scholar and the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Phi Theta Kappa.

"I went to school 31 years ago at (SUNY) Canton, but back then it was all about partying. Now I have a purpose for being in school. Now I'm here for a reason," said Mr. Halpin, who is a returning adult student



Halpin

With a dual major in Human Services and Chemical Dependency Practitioner, Mr. Halpin is the Lambda Beta Chapter (MVCC's chapter of Phi Theta Kappa) Vice President for Leadership and will transfer to Utica College in the Fall to pursue his bachelor's degree in Psychology with plans to complete a master's degree in Social Work. He is also the president of the Chemical Dependency Club.

"When I decided to come back to school, I knew there was a need in my life to change my path," said Mr. Halpin, who wants to give back something to the community. "I have a great desire to teach the next generation of students. From my life experience and education, I will have a much broader knowledge base. It is important for the next generation of counselors to have that."

Mr. Halpin's selection as a Coca-Cola Scholar was based on scores earned in the All-USA Academic Team competition. The Coca-Cola Scholar program is sponsored by the Coca-Cola Scholars Foundation and is administered by Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. As a Gold Scholar, Mr. Halpin will be provided with a certificate, gold medallion, and \$1,500 which will help further his education.

He is already giving back to the community by working as a peer tutor at MVCC as well as running the men's issue group at the McPike Addiction Treatment Center in Utica on Tuesday Nights. He is also a speaker at the Insight House Chemical Dependency Treatment Facility.

As he turns 50 this May, Mr. Halpin says the sacrifices he is making to complete his education isn't about getting rich but to achieve personal enrichment and fulfillment in his life.

"Because I'm older, I have a different work ethic than the students coming right out of high school. It's not that they aren't good students. They just haven't learned the lessons you can only get as an adult and I apply these lessons to my school work," added Mr. Halpin.

Mr. Halpin says being closer in age with his instructors has also made the transition easier as he is able to relate better.

"I have had nothing but top of the line instruction at MVCC. Some of the best relationships I have here are with faculty. Elin Cormican, I cannot say enough about. She really taught me to shut up, sit down and listen. She showed me I didn't know it all. Sometimes, returning adult students really need that," says Mr. Halpin.

Mr. Halpin is a native of Remsen and current resident of Utica. He has two grown sons, Robert III, 25, and Benjamin, age 23. His hobbies include golfing, fishing, hunting, and reading.

Kayla Critser named NJCAA Player of Week

MVCC's Kayla Critser was recently named the National Junior College Athletic Association Division III Player of the Week for the week of March 25. Critser, a sophomore from Herkimer, is a double-sports athlete for the Hawks for both basketball and softball over the past two years. She was chosen for the honor based on her performance on the MVCC women's softball team during the Snowbird Softball Tournament in Myrtle Beach, SC.

She went 19-for-33 at the plate to lead the Hawks to an 8-1 record for the previous week. She had eight extra-base hits, scored 19 runs and drove in 16 runs. The shortstop had two home runs in a double-header against Northampton and scattered four doubles and two triples over the week. She added two walks and stole eight bases.

Critser is a student in the Sports Medicine program who holds a 3.87 GPA.

The NJCAA is an association of intercollegiate athletics for community and junior colleges throughout the United States. There are 527 participating institutions.



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