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RCC honors special millionth graduate

By **ANNE SHREFFLER**
SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL NEWS

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RAMAPO - Yesterday's graduation at Rockland Community College was a special milestone of sorts.

The 46th commencement was also a time to honor David Rojas Jr., who was chosen by faculty members as the college's "special millionth graduate" and to acknowledge that this month community colleges in the State University of New York system will graduate their 1 millionth student.

After completing his freshman year at North Rockland High School in 1996, Rojas was found to have with medulla blastoma, a rare, malignant brain tumor that should have ended his hopes of ever graduating from college.

Surgery and cancer treatments left him with memory loss, double vision, third-degree burns and walking difficulties.

"Some told us this wasn't possible, that he could be a dishwasher, but he wouldn't have it," said Rojas' father, David Rojas.

The son said he is proud to be alive. So is his father, a New York City police officer sidelined by an injury.

For seven years, father and son attended classes together. While Rojas concentrated on class lectures, his father took notes to help his son review at home.

"After 30 years, I never expected to be in college," the father laughed, adding that he appreciates the students who were understanding and helpful. "Our future is in good hands," he said of the RCC graduates.

The family described RCC as incredibly supportive, working with Rojas at every step.

"He came here in a wheelchair, but now he is walking out as a man," his father said.

The graduates

These students were candidates for graduation from Rockland Community College yesterday, in December and August.

August 2006 graduates

Blauvelt: Brendan Jason Fridhandler, Laura Marie Morrissey, Kristina O'Connell

Chestnut Ridge: Julio Clerveaux, Irene DeMata, Suzanne Du Charme, Sean J. Roderick

Congers: Courtney Brooke Cassidy

Garnerville: Annemarie Madar, Carol A. Naber, Edward R. Timmons Jr.

Haverstraw: Victor R. Espinal, Karen Gibson, Lauryn E. Gray, Fausto B. Sicha, Edward Urena

Hillburn: Farzaneh Safaie Mojarad

Monsey: Adam Braun, Marlene Emeran, Marcus A. Fuentes, Zachary A. King, Valdes Massillon, Abdul Rahman Mohamad Saeed

Nanuet: Adam Fleisher, Joseph N. Koester, Lens M. Martial, Abdul-Kareem Bismillah Ibn Shabazz, Ivan K. Velez

New City: Kaitlin Michelle Delfini, Donna Maria Held, Anthony N. Iskander, Angela Beverly Katsizna, Jessica Tabin, Jonathan Ong Yao

New Hempstead: Darrin Alonzo Jefferson

Nyack: Michael Anderson

Pearl River: Jaclyn P. Babiak, John M. Blanco, Christina Phillips, Kyle P. Thompson

Piermont: Daniel WooHo Lee

Pomona: Julita Borko, Rommel Guerrero, Arius Dion Leake-Gaylord, Jennifer M. Yudman

Sloatsburg: Paul J. Modica

Spring Valley: Michel Desgrottes, Guerline Domond, Bryant G. Gaspard, Baile J. Glauber, Gittel Jacobs, Williere Jean Louis, Guy Joseph, Baron A. Newton, Rose Michelle Zil

Stony Point: Robert Thomas DiNuzzo, Arthur Vasena

Suffern: Anthony Biongo, Amy Bolognese Borelli, Min Wei Chen, Stephanie Robin Hayward, Mai Hirata, Mika Hoshino, Sergio Lopez, Jason Santa, Daniel Sheynin, Max J. Silverstein, Mao Sunohara, Tatsuya Terakado

Tappan: Thomas Abraham, Stephanie N. Gove, Christinamae Rispoli, Brian Zimmerman

Rojas plans to continue studying photography at the College of Art & Design at Purchase College, SUNY.

His work is currently on display at the Independent Living Center in the Nanuet Mall.

During his address to the graduates, RCC President Cliff Wood said that "caring is what it's all about" for the graduates.

He cited examples of their work, including a fundraiser for Darfur refugees, a fashion show for research in sickle cell disease and a Battle of the Bands that raised money for AIDS patients.

When Wood stopped the procession of graduates to honor a surprised David Rojas, who walked on stage with the aid of a cane, he choked up.

"David, we care about you, and we are pleased to recognize you. It is the school's mission to offer access and opportunity to everyone," he said.

The crowd gave Rojas a standing ovation.

RCC offers opportunities to many students like Rojas who face challenges that require a leveling of the playing field but surpass their own expectations.

Daniel Angelucci will go to the City University of New York's John Jay College, to continue his education in law enforcement.

Angelucci's guest - Kathleen Mundt, a teacher of the hearing impaired in the North Rockland school district - described RCC as open to many students with disabilities and special needs.

"He learned he had the skills and knowledge to do it," she said of her former student.

A recipient of the Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence, Angeline Stuma will attend Cornell University this fall to study applied economics and management. At RCC, Stuma played tennis and volleyball and was part of the African club.

She said she learned a lot as student government president.

"I was able to see how the school functions. It was one of the best experiences for me because I'm shy and I had to make speeches," she said.

Find hundreds of additional photos in the special graduation gallery at LoHud.com

Thiells: James Thomas Nannariello, Edwin C. Sanchez

Tomkins Cove: Tara Baranowske, Dana Thiesing

Valley Cottage: Ryan K. Keiser, Manish Murali Panicker, Gabrielle Tubito

Wesley Hills: Lauren Antoinette Lopez

West Haverstraw: Marisa Mary Damas

West Nyack: Chelsea Jacobson, Stephany Perez

December 2006 graduates

Airmont: Christine Marie Perfito, Harold George Sanchez, Gina Nicole Taffuri

Bardonia: Gregory Ross Fiorentino, Hwaeryeon Han, Misa Hirayama

Blauvelt: Gerald J. Bottari, Rosemary Delgado, Victoria Palumbo, Gina B. Sofia-Lettire

Chestnut Ridge: Eustache Clerveaux

Congers: Brian Costanza, Jacquelyn LePre, Michelle T. Maciurzynski, Gloria P. Rinciari, Catherine Ruckel, Priscilla Anne Wilson

Garnerville: Antonia Deleonardis, Georgina E.

Escribano, Gerald Etienne, Edward R. Judge, Shelda Millien

Haverstraw: Juditha J. Barthelemy, Ronald Diaz, Marlyn Espinal, John E. Glass Jr., Sandra M. Henriquez, Anna Jallow Jaiteh, Polina T. Kostadinova, Rigoberto Martinez, Fausto B. Sicha, Wanda Ivelisse Thillet, Josiane White

Hillcrest: Jacqueline Santos

Monsey: Valerie Bumbaco, Marlene Francois, Andriy Goltsev, Antoinette Marie Horrisland, Gina Marie Isaacs, Mohsin Javid, Deena Kohn, Ebben J. Lagarde, Yael Shoshana Lemel, Gabriella Pentrelli, Barbara Danuta Slota, Sebastien E. Tertulien, Shoshana E. Weissmandl

Montebello: Sean C. Hay

Nanuet: Maxine H. Brooks, Joseph R. Castro, Simrat Chatrik, Keisha Nicole Christian, Carlos Cordoba, Prasanna Jayathillake Dewapriyage, Laura Fisher, Shavonne Desiree Fonvil, Michael James Gargano, Luce Sadhia Jean Baptiste, Anthony E. Manzi, Danielle Maroff, Heather Irene Pomeranz, Joshua Rosen, Stephen Sumallo, Amor Melody Tello, David Michael Velez, Frank M. Zambrano

New City: Courtney Lynn Gentile, Jessica S. Gerardi, Dina Grossman, Raihan Hannan, Laura Kanaplu, Ruthy Keisar, Young Kwang Kim, Malgorzata Maniakowska, Jaime Marie Midulla, Ehud Nebel, Einat Goldfarb Nebel, Tara M. Ring, Lijo Thomas Samuel, Eric Neil Schreiber, Scott M. Seltzer, Matthew S. Sophinos, Erik Soto, Leanna Marie Wegielski, Elizabeth Zarrilli, Renata Zimmer

New Hempstead: Guirlene Dicette, Leslie Mehu, David Varkonyi

Nyack: Marjorie Athis, Rafael Baglietto, Autumn L. Brenner-Vigliante, Pierre Fils-Aime, Konstantin Kleiman, David Pompee, Jaime Marie Reidy, Veronica A. Russell, James E. Townes

Orangeburg: Corinne B. Palazolo, Linda D. Romano

Pearl River: Sean E. Brady, Virginia G. Cook, Thomas J. Lang, Patricia Margaret McCormick, Amanda Leanne Reihard

Pomona: Jessica Abreu, Mia Roxane Clark, Krystal L. Corcoran, Tanya Diona DiMetreau, Charisse T. Gaza, Efstathia Elly Gletsos, Charles G. Gran, Amy Moss, Kristina C. Rolon, Anthony M. Stancarone, Jonathan Tallis, Prince R. Varghese, Brian Wilson

Sloatsburg: Bryan A. Bogin, Kimberly Camargo, Lauren Kathleen Conklin, Masakiyo Kasama, Kathryn A. McGowan, Zandrina D. Vanderbeek

Sparkill: Kelsey L. Prediger

Spring Valley: Elda Adolphe, Michael S. Bachan, Marie Edith Beauvais, Moise Kenneth Belizaire, Ahuva Cabessa, Jeff Civil, Julian Paulo Endaya, Trina A. McKenzie-Epps, Cassandra J. Filcior, Delphine S. Francois, Manette Francois, Yves Claude Jean-Baptiste, Maeve S. Joseph, Vijith Jose, Laurie Millien, Denise Negron Oyola, Michael Pet, Marjorie Rene, Sherika N. Smith, Donna C. Yapyapan

Stony Point: Brian P. Coogan, Andrew Scarpone Dossi, Maureen A. Gill, Michael A. Livia, Jo Ann W. Phenix, Brianna Rose, Joy Scalera, Joseph A. Zinna

Suffern: Marcie Robyn Baron, Lauren Chersicla, Kara Emmons, Hazel Beatriz Gil Rodriguez, Dina Lynn Gilmartin, Emi Hagiwara, Vicky Jean-Joseph, Keun-Woo Kim, Cassandra Lynn King, Yuki Kyotani, Juliana M. Lovinger, Marlina L. Majestic, Marie M. Mathelier, Danielle Marie Migliaccio, Jennifer L. Mollokus, Shawn Nicole Patrick, Lori Pamela Pitkof, Pui King Teresa Pong, Donya Sadi, Randi Lauren Schwartz, Ryan A. Stephens

Tappan: Valsa J. Mathew

Thiells: Gina Castillo, Robertson Guercy

Valley Cottage: Christine Curley, Courtney Lia Sturm

West Haverstraw: Silvany Efendie, Christina Marie Gonzalez

West Nyack: Jared S. Daniels

May 2007 graduates

Bardonia: Michael Aharoni, Emmaliesle Bierker, Beth Etta Schweizer Broadnax, Bonnie Chang, Jill Ashley Rickli, Tiffany Taffe

Blauvelt: Judith Basso, Lyndsay E. Falco, Brittany E. McLaughlin, Casey A. Pereira, Alice H. Ryan, Julia Marie Sheridan

Chestnut Ridge: Liedrea M. Allen, Michedette Ciceron, James Gerard Hargat, Frank Miranda IV, Nina Mittal, Romaine Price, Taryn Jaye Price, Cherish K. Riley

Congers: John Luke Chemerov, Joel R. Cruz, Gregory Lewis, Nicole G. Masiello, Kathryn Ann McCormack, Michelle V. Ragusa, Stephanie A. Sabino, Rhia C. Tolentino, Brigitte Weinberg

Garnerville: Alan R. Buchholtz, Andrew Thomas Canariato, Jeanne Clark, Deanna C. Coleman, Rekha Dewan, Emma Efeti Ewusi, Chris Facciola, Stephanie Marie Hewitt, Elizabeth Ann Mangual, Mahadia Morissaint, Dale Thomas O'Dell Jr., Marco Riccoboni, David J. Rojas, Jennifer Torres, Alan C. Vargas

Haverstraw: Joseph Thomas WOard Aquilino, Georgeline Aristide, Karolyn M. Cruz, Korym Cruz, Nicholas Culver, Richard Thomas Dunn, Anthony R. Ford, Wendy Jeanniton, Kate Johnson, Jeffrey F. Krol, Hong M. Nguyen, Darline R. Paulin, George Mose Pavilus, Mary Sims, Kaylyn Marie Strysko, Stephanie J. Ventura

Hillburn: Maria Angela G. Navarro, Jorge Ruiz

Hillcrest: Wendy E. Beron, Marie Oslie Domond

Monsey: Chaim D. Adler, Jodie Arnold, Malka Bernstein, Marlon T. Brillantes, Monika Ufir, David D. Fernando, Levy Y. Forchheimer, Tzadok Gable, Melissa Galati, Sara Gilbert, Aylah Loewenstein, Jessie Meehan,

Alicia M. Noel, Loel Park, Lowly Pierre, Kinga Piersiak, James Raymond, Rachel J. Rosenbaum, Ruth Sternfield, Rie Suzuki, Barbara A. Wanamaker

Montebello: Gregory F. Gomes

Nanuet: Michael Aquilante, Samantha Arena, Michelle Bonacci, Thomas Buckenberger, Christina Michelle Conte, Patrick Dowling, Laurie Michelle Drago, Michael James Gargano, Nicole M. Higgins, Christine A.

Jackson, Janine Jackson, Keith Lee, Lance L. Liberstein, Pui Sum Lo, Kathy I. Manalang, Alexandra Markowski, Jennifer L. McDonald, Kevin Peter Ostrom, Michael Panzarino, Amy Patel, Carissa M. Petrillo, Samantha Reda, Philip Santos, David S. Schwartz, Christopher Matthew Sferlazza, Reynaldo J. Suazo, Jenny Marie Ucker, Kim-Marie Ugenti, Zaida B. Yupa

New City: Dorota Edyta Adamczyk, Sergei Alexeev, Anthony James Amendola, Ana Maria Barbas, Basmy Basher Jr., Daniel M. Birnbaum, Samantha Hayley Bomzer, Michael Brennan, Amy Ceresnak, Vincenzo Cortimiglia, Kenneth Cosgrove, Gregory De Marco, Gerard DeCarlo, Claire Altagrace Malory Duverger, Joseph J. Farrenkopf, Evan R. Follo, Maren Gallo, Dean A. Gentile, Alex M. Gomberg, Timothy John Horbach, Eddy S. Jean-Baptiste, Michael Kcira, Angelo J. Koutros, Ariel Lender, Shu-Fen Liao, Joel Mathew, Justina L. Narine, Igor Nikolskiy, Gina Pachlin, Maria A. Parziale, Karyl E. Pointer, Amanda Rice, Asvinee Ruiz, Sangyeon Son, Tana Tosto, Jonathan C. Zisser

New Hempstead: Lisa M. Davis, Christopher D. Dillon, Tzivia B. Gottlieb, Beatrice M. A. McCarthy, Batsheva Schwab

Nyack: Collin M. Crabtree-Keeler, Wayne R. Evans, Nicholas Hair, Colby Ippoliti, Sarah Mary Katavolos, Kelly O. Gaetz, Erin M. Lapayover, Jane E. Pluhowski, Madeleine Svensson, Elizabeth M. Tangredi, Robert Valdez, Jr., Elena Vasilenko

Orangeburg: Marilou Antonio, Amanda L. Feiertag, Michael A. Kelly, Robert A. Reid, Angelina Yucht

Palisades: Roxana Bartolome, Amanda Christine Vogt

Pearl River: Annmarie Connell, Jenna Lynn Cawley, Veronica T. Cooper, Michael Damien Daly, Terence Ryan Hanneman, Yvonne Leahy, Brendan A. Murphy, Michael Terrence O'Keefe, Christina T. Schaudel, Drayton Robert Shorter, Heidi Lyn Spicer, Heather A. Taylor, Amy Lynn Vassallo

Piermont: Liz Fagan

Pomona: Michael Aspinall, Tanya Diona DiMetreau, Stanley S. Dorelien, Kerry Ann Furey, April Elizabeth Hansen, Austin Victor Hansen III, Michael LaCondi, Kim S. Mihok-Wade, Mary Ann Monaghan, Paul Senzamici, Michael A. Sheridan, Jonathan J. Urena Pena

Sloatsburg: Steven Mitts, John Sheehan

Sparkill: Jennifer T. Garcia

Spring Valley: Nicole V. J. Anayannis, Cleo Bailey-Blagrove, Darryl J. Benjamin, Mini Chacko, Cleon J. Cyrus, Zuzana Debrard, Eddy E.

Vixamar-Dixon, Martine Elysee, Katia Etienne, Krystle L. Fajiculay, Sherline Fleury, Marie Carmelle Francois, Wendy E. Francois, Mona D. Galette, Lemlem A.

Hailemariam, Sharon Ivy, Leon Jacques, Ketsia L.

Jean-Baptiste, Knollis L. Junior, Katsiaryna

Kananovich, Stephen B. Kentish, Zara S. Khan, Anne

R. Legerme, William C. Leonard, Marie-Jocelyne J.

Louis-Paul, Farrah Marlow, Kimberly Ann

McDole-Gordon, Matthew Michel, Ian G. Mirsky,

Johane Paulemon, Neomie Pierrilus, Charis O. Pinkston, Richardson Rabil, Naomi Ramsey-Stewart, Marsia V. Riley, Kocka R. Sabban, Oksana G. Sackaris, Shaina Moriah Sadow, Olsen Monel Samedy, Marlene Avril Sanon, Teresa Sciarretta Bellaby, Peta-Gaye Toni Simpson, Tova Soloff, Stephanie St. Louis, Mordechai Steinfeld, Daniel Tang, Phoebe Jan V. Tan, Pamela Toral, Vince Luigi Valencia, Dely P. Vil, Josh A. Zelcer, Jaime Zhinin

Stony Point: Daniel J. Angelucci, Keith R. Baisley, Fanny Benderoth, Beatrice Burkert, Kenneth D. Daniels, Gregory Dillon, Anthony Dilullo, Stephanie E. Jackson, Nicole Marie Karell, Victoria Rayco Mahan, Michael Pantliano, Gregory L. Pelton, Maryann Perruna, Alicia Ramos-Rosado, James M. Rist, Francine J. Triano

Suffern: Stacey Lynne Barba, Mikhail Y. Bayankin, Amanda T. Belanich-McNamee, Kathryn Louise Borghoff, Michelle A. Buffardi, Jessica Lynn Christensen, William Dowling, Shaaron Elisha, Michelle Gariola, Michael L. Holden, Deborah Jansen, Hetali Joshi, Sophary Kim, Adam Kostrinsky, Avi Kramarczyk, Stephanie Kunow, Jeffrey A. Oregero Jr., Andrew E. Perez, Patrice Providence, Natalie Ramos, Earl Ricci, Hannah Rice, Keith A. Rich, Joshua Eric Roberts, Erin M. Rooney, Jennifer Corey Spampinato, Yukiko Suda, Joseph Sussman, Robert A. Valentin

Tappan: Lauren Bochart, Mirline Desir, Denise Ferri, Reethamma Joseph, Carolyn Ladolcetta, Elizabeth M. Nick, Thomas H. Nick, Flor de Maria Rivera, Christine Joy Solidum, Kathleen Ann Spratley-Watters

Thiells: Camillia M. Constantinides, James L. Natale, Andrew B. Neiderman, Myles Peckler

Tomkins Cove: Joseph Coskey, Seth Evan Fisher, Lisa Marie Rose, Megan Elisabeth Shea

Valley Cottage: Jennifer Ann Argenti, Karen Christine Armada, Timothy P. Marino, John G. Owen

West Haverstraw: Enis M. Giannone, Joanne G. Schroeder, Elizabeth R. Shurman, Mary Thomas, Tara Jacqueline Marie Wargo

West Nyack: Tasnim Amina Azad, Sean Jordan, Peter J. Milmore, Pamela J. Notaro, Arleen M. Ott