

# 321 graduate at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods

FOR THE TRIBUNE-STAR

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College welcomed 321 graduates from the Class of 2024 to join thousands of alumni Saturday during its 190th commencement.

Commencement speakers were students selected by a committee from nominations by students, faculty, staff and the student body. Nominees had a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 or greater, among other criteria requirements.

Polet Horsley Horton, who received degrees in nursing and kinesiology, addressed her peers during the morning ceremony honoring campus undergraduates.

"Although we share this special moment together, each one of us has unique backgrounds, gifts and qualities, creating new legacies to inspire us and the people around us as we go into this new chapter of our lives. Each one of us has created a legacy, whether we know it or not, that inspires future generations among families, friends or even ourselves as we take a new road of our own legacy story," she said.

After receiving his degree, Jesse Burdick, a sport management major who transferred to SMWC his junior year, shared the impact that The Woods community has had on him.

"I never thought that this day would come for me, but SMWC has made it possible for that to happen. Everyone I have encountered has been



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nothing but helpful throughout my two years here. It almost doesn't feel real for me. Even when my classes were hard, I knew there were multiple people I could always reach out to for help. This has truly been a great experience and will always be something I will cherish forever," Burdick said.

In the afternoon ceremony, online and graduate students reflected on inspiring words shared by Elizabeth Hein, a graduate from the first master of business administration cohort.

"The world to you is different than the world of the person sitting next to you. We have made it to the top of our first mountain. I encourage each of you to pause, look around and admire the beauty that comes from achieving this milestone,"

Hein said.

Brandi Adams, also a graduate of the first MBA cohort, shared what it meant to be part of the first group to graduate from the program.

"I am so honored to be a part of the first MBA cohort at SMWC. The Woods is such an incredibly special place for me and to be able to continue my education and advance my career through the newly established MBA program truly feels like a full circle moment for me. To have completed my bachelors at SMWC, which gave me the skills and prepared me to enter my professional career, and be able to complete my MBA, which has already propelled my career (in conjunction with the completion of the master of leadership development

last August) has been a very special experience for me," Adams said.

Award winners were recognized during the ceremonies.

The Alumni Leadership and Service Award recognizes a graduate who demonstrated outstanding leadership and service during their time at SMWC. Katrina Strow received the Undergraduate Alumni Leadership and Service Award and Kirby Gilliam received the Graduate Alumni Leadership and Service Award.

The Maud Helm Rockwell Medal for Academic Excellence is given to a graduate of the campus-based program and a graduate of the Woods Online program with the highest academic grade point average. Medals were awarded to Sara Allard, Graycee Ansari, Julian Green and Bailey Thompson in the campus ceremony, and to Jeannie Owsley and Stephanie Potts in the Woods Online ceremony.

During the morning ceremony, interim President Brennan J. Randolph presented The Distinguished Alumni Award to Barbara Brugnaux, a 1970 graduate.

A baccalaureate liturgy ceremony was held on campus in the Church of Immaculate Conception between the ceremonies.

*— This article was provided to the Tribune-Star by Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College.*