

Country Day grads express their thanks

Class of 2002's 7 members tell how school helped them

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Philip Montenegro said he struggled to come up with the right words for his graduation speech at Rockland Country Day School.

"You sit and try to think of a speech that sums up your life as an adolescent," said Montenegro, who will attend Rockland Community College's Mentor/Talented Honors Program in the fall and plans to transfer to Sarah Lawrence College after two years. "And, let me tell you, it's not easy."

Each of the seven members of RCDS's class of 2002 got to speak at the graduation and express how important the small private school was to their growth.

"Every individual matters. If I'm not in school one day, it actually makes a difference," said Tatiana Gorsky. "I'm important and I want to thank RCDS for helping me find that out." She plans to attend Russell Sage College to participate in a five-year occupational therapy master's degree program.

She stressed that RCDS is an independent school that helped make her an independent person.

"I am happy to be privileged enough to be in an environment that let me grow as a person emotionally and physically," Gorsky said. "RCDS prepared me as an individual to go on to college."

All of yesterday's graduates said RCDS helped them make important decisions in their academic and personal futures and learn priceless lessons, including the ability to think and concern for themselves and others.

"RCDS was the perfect place for me to grow," said Emily Friedhoff, a musician and poet accepted to Bard College. "I remember every year before this wanting to leave, but this year I don't want to leave. I'm going to miss everyone."

Also graduating were Amanda Gerdes, who plans to attend Pratt Art Institute and Jung Yong-Sang, who has been accepted to Polytechnic University.

Allison Kurtz - who had the highest grades in her class, was accepted to Smith College and will spend six weeks of the summer traveling in Laos and Thailand exploring the rain forests and performing community service.

"People say you make your friends in college that you will keep for life; I feel like I've made them here," said graduate Lauren Mancuso, who has been accepted under the early decision plan to George Washington University. "I am so appreciative for the school, the teachers."

Teachers and administrators seemed to be appreciative, too.

"These are very special kids and a very special school," said Ellen Nodelman, a teacher and administrator for 32 years who currently serves as the college guidance counselor and was chosen by the graduating class to speak at commencement. "They are interesting, diverse, enterprising and caring kids - as evidenced by the fact that some couldn't get through their speeches without tears. That's what our school is all about."

RCDS Headmaster James P. Handlin said he enjoyed the personal messages from each member of the class of 2002. "Each graduate had a voice and spoke about and thanked their families. It is so rare today for high school students to do that and it is a testimony to their academic preparation and the preparation of the human heart," Handlin said. "They are unafraid to show emotions, concern for others and the world."