It was a day of celebration at Wagner College on Friday as 630 students received degrees during the school’s 134th commencement ceremony at the Grymes Hill campus. It was also a bittersweet day for Dr. Richard Guarasci, who is retiring in June after serving as the school’s president for 22 years.

Photos by Jan Somma-Hammel, Staten Island Advance

Dr. Richard Guarasci and his wife, Dr. Carin Guarasci, were honored for their contributions to the school.

A student makes an emotional gesture after receiving his diploma.

For more on the graduation ceremony, see Pages A8-9
Wagner College graduates 630

GRYMES HILL

Wagner College's president, Dr. Richard Guarasci, told graduates at the school's 116th commencement ceremony on Friday that this generation will produce outstanding leaders the world needs today.

"As you know, for the past 22 years, Wagner College has had my heart and my mind. This is such a special community and a special place," said Guarasci, who was awarded an honorary degree during the ceremony. "I know many of you personally, and I'm quite confident that you're going to achieve many milestones in your careers — and many of you will receive honors similar to this one that I'm so humbled to be awarded today. I have great faith in your generation to produce a substantial number of outstanding leaders, and I truly mean this..."

Guarasci has been the president at the college for 22 years, and announced earlier this year that he will be retiring in June. He became provost at Wagner College in 1991, in which he led faculty in a major curricular reorganization that produced the Wagner Plan for the Practical Liberal Arts.

When Wagner College President Norman Smith announced his pending departure in 2002, Guarasci was tapped in his successor by the university's board of trustees. Guarasci was the keynote speaker at Friday's ceremony, stating that the graduates have developed important skills that will help them in their own careers.

"Today you are graduating from a fine college, a very fine college, and you are well prepared for the next step of pursuit of a successful career," said Guarasci.

All of these experiences at Wagner have made you successful here. They form the foundation of success in your eventual profession and in your personal lives as well. They are your bedrock for success," said Guarasci.

Guarasci's wife, Dr. Carla Guarasci, the founder of the New Educators at Wagner membership and professional development program, also received an honorary degree at the ceremony.

This year's commencement was the 116th graduation ceremony held on Wagner College's Grymes Hill campus. The school was founded in 1864 in New York, N.Y., and moved to its current location in 1870.

A total of 804 degrees were awarded, including bachelor's, master's, post-master's certificates and the first doctorate degree.

Student speaker Kenzy Z. Hyman, a business management major, explained how reluctant she was to try new things, but found the courage to make a difference.

During her time at Wagner, she joined the track and field team, Women's Professional Network, the Women of Color Dialogue Circle and the Black Student Union.

"I'm the Class of 2014, keep thriving and making positive changes in the world," said Hyman.

The second student speaker, Daniel D. Smith, a public policy and administration major, explained that being put out of your comfort zone opens your eyes to new ideas. Smith has been the leader of the LGBTQ+ student alliance organization, Iris Alliance, and described the college as a community of friends.

"Even though we all go separate ways, we're still a community. They were not friends, they are friends. They were not once home, they are home," said Smith.

It was a happy day for graduates Gabriella DeSarte, left, Amanda Burch and Emily Miller. All three received physician assistant master's degrees at the 116th Wagner College commencement, held on Friday on the Grymes Hill campus.

Jan Somme/Hannett, Staten Island Advance photos

Fond farewell: Retiring President Dr. Richard Guarasci honored

Gabriella DeSarte. For the Staten Island Advance

Speakers for the Class of 2019 were Kenzy Z. Hyman and Daniel S. Smith.
Graduate John Dempsey, with his son, Grayson, at the graduation ceremony.