Mass. first lady Diane Patrick encourages MCLA grads, reflects on personal struggles

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A member of the MCLA graduating class of 2013 receives a congratulatory hug from a faculty member during Sunday May 19, 2013

NORTH ADAMS -- In a packed gymnasium with the sun shining outside, more than 400 received degrees during the 114th commencement ceremonies at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts on Saturday.

Four others -- Elizabeth Coleman, Mardi Ann Crane-Godreau, John Downing and Diane Patrick -- received honorary degrees for extraordinary service in their professions and communities.

Patrick, first lady of Massachusetts, was also the keynote speaker at the commencement.

She noted that the commencement ceremony "recognizes the struggles large and small that each of you has had to deal with, as well as the strength and determination of each of you."

Patrick recalled that her struggle with depression a few years back was an opportunity to learn about her strengths and her challenges.
"Today I stand here stronger than I ever imagined I could be," she said. "You just have to power through those rough moments. You have to take risks, you have to walk through those new doors to discover who you are and what's possible."

Among those in the audience was Tabetha Murray, of South Glens Falls, N.Y. As a single mom, Murray raised her son, Brycen Waters, and watched on Saturday as he graduated from college.

"He's amazing," she said. "He's done really well, worked real hard, even through the summers."

"He's the second of the Murray family to ever graduate college," added proud grandfather Bob Murray.

David Blake, of Gardner, was also in the audience, watching his daughter Corrine Blake receive her diploma.

"Today feels great," he said. "This is my second to graduate this year. Only one more to go."

Bruce Johnston, of Worcester, was also there cheering on his daughter Jennifer as she graduated. Jennifer majored in environmental studies and minored in biology. She'll soon start her new job as a park interpreter at Natural Ridge State Park in North Adams.

"I feel so accomplished -- it says a lot to have graduated from this exceptional college," she said. "Now I'm anxious to get out there and share my knowledge."

Dad Bruce Johnston noted that he'll be back as well -- Jennifer's little sister, Ali, is also a student at MCLA.

"They both ended up going to the same college, which made it a bit easier for us," he said. "So we're doubly proud."