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Journalist Urges Class of 2006 Not to Take Freedoms for Granted

KEUKA PARK, N.Y.—Award-winning journalist Claudia Rosett once met a North Korean who had escaped his country's totalitarian regime into the "miserable but relatively free environs of Russia.

"He was stateless and desperate, but still grateful to be in a place where he no longer had to march in lockstep to the orders of a tyrant," said Rosett at Keuka College's 98th commencement today (May 28). "He sat, in hiding, marveling at what he perceived to be the liberties and luxuries of decrepit, post-Soviet-Russia, and asked me wistfully, 'Is it true that America is better than this?'"

Rosett didn't have to answer that question today in Keuka Park because the graduating seniors knew the answer. What she did do was urge them to remember why the answer was so obvious to them but not to the North Korean.

"Today, the portals of the world stand open to you," said Rosett, journalist-in-residence at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies and former member of *The Wall Street Journal* editorial board. "You have both the schooling and the freedom to pursue what you will, to choose the kind of work you do, who you share your life with, the mentors, the colleagues and even the enemies who will in one way or another allow you to use your individual knowledge, skill, talent and imagination to live a full life.

"You can do this because you live in America," added Rosett, who has been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize four times. "You can do this because our system protects your liberty and provides a framework of law in which you have the chance—more than anywhere else on earth—to follow your heart, to make yourself what you will. It is the wellspring of America's success, it is an extraordinary gift—bequeathed to us by generations who built this country and the many citizens who have fought and died to defend it.

"We all know this," said Rosett, "and yet it is easy in the daily grind to lose sight of it."

Rosett said she "spends a fair amount of time myself trying to call attention to the foibles, hypocrisies and failings that attend upon our democracy. But as a journalist it has also been my privilege to travel widely over the past quarter century and from that vantage it becomes easier to see a bigger picture. We live in the greatest country on earth. America is powerful not because of

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our size, our numbers, or our natural resources—all of which are dwarfed in one way or another by places elsewhere. This country is great precisely because it runs on the principles that we are all endowed with the right to life, liberty and the pursuit happiness. That, by its very nature, is an affront to the tyrants of the world.”

Rosett’s father, Richard, chairman of the Keuka College Board of Trustees, received an honorary doctor of humane letters degree at graduation.

A member of the Keuka College Board of Trustees since 1992, he has served as chairman since 2002. His tenure as Board chairman has been marked by enrollment increases, the addition of new majors, growth in the Accelerated Studies for Adults Program and China program, the addition of new sports, the successful beginning of *The Campaign to Save Ball Hall*, and many other positive developments.

Former dean of RIT’s College of Business, he helped RIT develop a national and international reputation and brought distinction to the region by developing such innovative programs as the RIT/USA Today Quality Cup competition and the U.S. Business School in Prague, Czechoslovakia.

Also honored at commencement were faculty members Mary Schleiermacher, Kay Viggiani and Gail Roberts.

Schleiermacher (physical education), retiring after 36 years at the College, was recently granted professor emeritus status by the Board of Trustees. Viggiani, associate professor of nursing, is retiring after 18 years at Keuka and Roberts, associate professor and director of the social work program, received the Professor of the Year Award.

Commencement day activities began with baccalaureate, featuring an address by Chaplain Maj. Gen. Lorraine Potter (USAF, retired), a 1968 Keuka College graduate.