Approximately 1,300 members of the Class of 2006, along with several thousand friends and family members, gathered on Gengras lawn under an overcast sky for the University of Hartford’s 49th annual Commencement ceremony on May 21. Adding to the pageantry of the day were new red ceremonial banners bearing the names of the schools and colleges. The banners preceded the degree candidates as they marched into the seating area.

President Walter Harrison asked the graduates to reflect for a moment on their four or more years at the University of Hartford, on what brought them to the campus, and on the major achievements and challenges, both on campus and off, during their undergraduate careers. He remarked on the particular sense of caring for each other that he has witnessed since coming to the University. Harrison asked the graduates to take that sense of community out into the world where, he said, it truly matters.

Connecticut State Treasurer Denise L. Nappier received an honorary Doctor of Laws and joined the festive mood, declaring, “By the authority vested in me by the laws of this great state—and because I don’t see anyone here who can stop me—I hereby declare this day to be University of Hartford Class of 2006 Day of Celebration!”

Elected in 1998 and reelected in 2002, Nappier is the only woman to be elected treasurer in Connecticut history, and she is the first African American woman elected state treasurer in the United States. Nappier has been a catalyst and advocate for financial education in the state, working with the private sector and community-based organizations to expand financial literacy programs.

An honorary Doctor of Science was awarded to Charles H. Thornton, an internationally acclaimed structural engineer. Thornton’s firm has been honored for its disaster response efforts in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. He is also a strong advocate of educational outreach and mentoring. In 1995 Thornton
Row one (l–r): Four faculty awards were presented to Professor Walter Banzhaf, Associate Professor Charles R. Canedy III, Associate Professor Laura Pence, and Professor Warren Goldstein. Charles H. Thornton received an honorary Doctor of Science, and Connecticut State Treasurer Denise L. Nappier received an honorary Doctor of Laws.

Row two (l–r): New alumni celebrate; Eliott Ponte, president of the Student Government Association, receives his gavel from President Harrison; graduate Felecia Williams gets a kiss from her mother, Juliet, manager of the University’s Copy Shoppe; student speaker Daniel Dabek with student award winners Danielle Miller and Lauren Zaccaro.

francis x. hursey a’73, ’77

Distinguished Alumni Award

A new addition to this year’s spring Commencement ceremony was the presentation of the 2006 Distinguished Alumni Award. Scientist, inventor, and entrepreneur Francis X. Hursey A’73, ’77 (pictured above right with President Walter Harrison) received the award from regent Robert H. Feld ’69, M’72, president of the Alumni Association.

Hursey is the discoverer of QuikClot, a hemostatic agent that helps stop massive bleeding from traumatic injury. He is also founder and president of two sister companies. Z-Medica, LLC, is the medical products manufacturer of QuikClot and other lifesaving products. On Site Gas Systems, Inc., designs and builds oxygen and nitrogen equipment used in more than 60 countries.

Both companies have provided lifesaving equipment and solutions to troops on the ground in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the United States, police and fire departments use QuikClot to save lives at the scenes of accidents, fires, and crimes. After Hurricane Katrina, On Site sent portable oxygen-generating systems and cylinder-filling systems, while Z-Medica donated 1,200 units of QuikClot. Employees from On Site drove the products to New Orleans and remained there to distribute them to physicians and first responders.

Hursey received associate’s and bachelor’s degrees from the College of Engineering.

founded the ACE Mentor Program, which provides guidance and training in architecture, construction, and engineering to inner-city high school students in 57 U.S. cities.

“I’m a structural engineer, but I’m more than that—I’m a businessman, I’m an entrepreneur, and I’m a mentor,” Thornton told the graduates. He reminded the audience that the faculty, the students, and he himself had benefited from having mentors, and that students in the inner cities of America “are not getting the kind of guidance they need.”

Associate Professor of Chemistry Laura Pence received the Roy E. Larsen Award for Excellence in Teaching; Professor of History Warren Goldstein was recognized with the James E. and Frances W. Bent Award for Scholarly and/or Artistic Creativity; Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering Walter Banzhaf received the Oscar and Shoshana Trachtenberg Award for Service to the University; and Associate Professor of Marketing Charles R. Canedy III was presented with the Donald W. Davis All-University Curriculum Award.

Two seniors were honored for their outstanding achievements. Lauren Zaccaro, who graduated summa cum laude from the College of Engineering, Technology, and Architecture with a degree in mechanical engineering, received the Belle K. Ribicoff Prize for academic excellence, leadership, and extracurricular activity. Danielle Miller, a graduate summa cum laude of the College of Arts and Sciences with a major in psychology, was awarded the John G. Lee Medal, which recognizes a Greater Hartford senior who has excelled academically and been deeply involved in community service. The student speaker was Daniel Dabek, a graduate magna cum laude of The Hartt School with a bachelor’s in music.

Hartford Art School graduate magna cum laude Ronald A. Pezzullo II gets a congratulatory kiss from his parents, Nancy and Ron Pezzullo.