

At age **96**

Violet Edwards '22
Earns Her Degree
and Sets Records

It is really a tossup as to what is most impressive about Violet Edwards '22, a Parkland, Florida resident and Mercy College's newest, oldest graduate. It could be that at 96, she is the oldest Black college graduate in America. As well as the fifth oldest person in the world to graduate college. It could be that she spent the last couple of years finishing her Associate of Science degree by taking courses at Mercy fully online. It could be that she is the first person to receive a high school diploma from her hometown in Jamaica.

Or it could be that she is now a source of pride for the entire Mercy College institution. Edwards received her degree in May but was unable to travel north for the commencement ceremony. So, Mercy brought commencement to her and celebrated her accomplishment with the fanfare she more than deserved.

PACT Mentor Kathyria Feliciano Cosme presented Edwards with a cap, gown and an official copy of her degree at a special ceremony held by Parkland Gardens, the retirement community where she resides. "It has been beyond a privilege and an honor to have met you, to guide you, and you have taught me a great deal," Feliciano Cosme told her. "You are unstoppable."

Mercy College President Tim Hall, who attended the ceremony over Zoom, told Edwards, "You've done the work of students who are normally 18, or 19, or 20, so that is deeply impressive. I can't tell you how honored I am to get to see you and to recognize this great accomplishment."

In attendance was Oliver Mair, Consul General from Jamaica, who said Edwards now joins quite an illustrious group. "Jamaica has given to the world Bob Marley, Usain Bolt, Marcus Garvey, Shelly-Ann Fraser-Price — and now we give you Violet Edwards!"

Also in attendance was Edwards' daughter, Christine Edwards, for whom Edwards had dropped out of college decades ago to support her academic pursuits in going to college and then to medical school. "This is a very emotional day," said Christine. "I have the best mom in the world."

Christine said her mom took the responsibilities of mastering her online courses very seriously, and the family was fully supportive. "There were a lot of late nights," she said. "I would say 'Vi, can you come to dinner?'" Her mom responded with, "Nope, I have to study!"

Oftentimes, Edwards would write papers in long hand — including one which was 32-pages — which Christine then typed into the computer. "I told Christine, this



Christine Edwards, PACT Mentor Kathyria Feliciano Cosme, Violet Edwards '22 and Consul General from Jamaica Oliver Mair

paper is ready to download," Edwards said. To which Christine responded, "No mommy — upload. Upload!"

Asked what drove her to finish getting her degree, after dropping out in the early 80s to support her daughter, Edwards answered: "It's something I started. And I said, let me finish it. You have to have the determination in you, and to push on and achieve what you want."

"You have to have the determination in you, and to push on and achieve what you want."

Edwards actually started at the College of New Rochelle (CNR); she says she had wanted to be a nurse. But she dropped out to help support her daughter get a medical degree and then establish a practice. Edwards made a successful career at Jamaica's postal service, Jamaica Post, climbing the ranks to become the first appointed Female Regional Inspector. After retiring — and moving to the United States — she vowed she would go back to school. But the process was anything but straightforward: CNR had closed and her academic records were at Mercy.

Undaunted, Edwards pushed to get what credits she could and took a specially designed course at Mercy to demonstrate that certain life experiences could transfer for academic credits. Then she began to take courses online at Mercy. In May of this year Violet learned she had enough credits for the Associate of Science degree, and she is close to earning her bachelor's degree.

At the close of the special commencement ceremony, Hall told her, "You are a daughter of a great college in the state of New York: Mercy College. And I hope as your life continues on that you'll have an occasion to come back. You will always be welcome at your alma mater."

Edwards answered: "I will be back."