



Linda Finnan - Class of 2011
Associate in Arts in Liberal Arts / Psychology
Graduates with Highest Honors - Valedictorian
DARC Program*

First PCCC Graduate from Ireland Becomes Valedictorian

It is fitting that Linda Finnan should be valedictorian of PCCC's Class of 2011. A trained actor who hopes to become a speech therapist, Linda is an articulate voice for PCCC and plans to emphasize her gratitude to the College in her valedictory address at Thursday's commencement ceremonies.

She is also the first Ireland-born graduate of the College, a fact marked by the Irish flag that will join other international banners onstage at commencement to celebrate the diversity of PCCC. "I'm very honored to represent such a commendable and outstanding class," said Linda who graduates with a 4.0 grade point average and highest honors. "I'll never forget PCCC and all the help and support I received."

Emigrated From Ireland to a New Life in the USA

Born and raised in Listowel in County Kerry, Ireland, Linda initially studied drama at Liberties College in Dublin, and performed in theaters there before making what she called a "life changing decision" to emigrate in 1993 to New York. After working several office jobs, marrying, and settling in Hawthorne, New Jersey, Linda quit her job to raise two children.

"We've made sacrifices, so I could be a stay-at-home mom," said Linda, but she recognizes that not everyone has that option. "I have great respect for the single moms that I met at PCCC. I give them so much credit." (*continued next page*)

Right: Linda Finnan, valedictorian of the Class of 2011 and PCCC President Dr. Steven Rose stand beneath the flag of Ireland onstage where commencement ceremonies celebrate the diversity of the College's graduating class and student body.





Linda Finnan with her daughter Katelyn-Eve, 6, and 11-year-old son, Connor.

Faced Challenges When She Returned to College

Linda resumed her education in 2003 at PCCC's Wanaque campus, but she stopped short of completing her degree with only two classes to go because of a math phobia. "I didn't think I could handle it," she said. It was Joan Meeh, an administrator of the DARC program at PCCC who persuaded Linda to return to college.

*DARC is a grant-funded program that enables adults who have earned some college credits to complete their degree. "Joan was so helpful," said Linda. "She put me in touch with Professor Howard Schwartzberg who helped me get past my math challenge. I even got an A in my math class," she marveled.

Then the time from 2006 to 2007 brought more challenges as Linda traveled frequently to Ireland due to both her parents' illnesses. "They died within a few months of each other," she said. "I didn't think I could make it through school after that, but everyone at PCCC was so kind and supportive," she said. "I'm very grateful to Professor (Martin) Bookbinder. He was a wonderful mentor and gave me a lot of encouragement."

Compassion Guides Career Goals

Linda noted that her father's illness had affected his swallowing and her husband had a relative who lost his ability to speak after suffering a stroke. "As a theater person, I have a strong interest in speaking and after seeing our relatives lost speech abilities, I felt I wanted to help people with speech disorders, especially children with autism.

"It would be a dream for me to gift the gift of speech," said Linda who plans to continue her education at either Seton Hall University or Montclair State University.

For now, it's a different kind of speech that occupies her thoughts. "I'm nervous," she admitted about her duty to deliver the valedictory address. But then she thought about her husband, John, and their two children, Connor, 11, and 6-year-old Katelyn-Eve. "When they hear me give my speech, they will be very proud," she said.

**DARC: Disengaged Adults Returning to College*

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