

Access for All: Leonard Riggio's Landmark Gift to KCC



"It's not fame or fortune which defines us, but our dreams. Don't ever let anyone take your dreams away. Be tough. You're from Brooklyn." – Leonard Riggio

As the keynote speaker for Kingsborough Community College's (KCC) 54th Commencement Address, Leonard Riggio, Founder and Chairman of Barnes and Noble, Inc., did far more than just move the audience with stirring oratory. **He made a \$1 million pledge to establish the "Class of 2019 100 Strong Scholarship", which will provide full tuition support for two years to 100 Kingsborough students.**

A leading philanthropist and pioneering entrepreneur, Mr. Riggio believes that affordable, high-quality education is a cornerstone to our democracy: "Nothing is more important to me than the pursuit of civil and human rights. Young people suffocated by student loans is not my idea of a functioning society. Implicit in this idea of democracy, free high-quality college education must be available to all."

Despite his wealth and success, Mr. Riggio can relate to KCC students today who struggle to pay for college. After graduating high school, he had to work for "\$1 an hour" as a bookstore clerk to pay for tuition as an NYU student. Never losing sight of his working-class roots, the man once referred to as "the Ted Turner of Bookstores" has long championed affordable college for all, making him an ideal partner for one of the nation's top community colleges.

In his remarks to the graduating class, he also expressed a kinship with them that transcends generations and backgrounds: "I'm Brooklyn, true and true. Everything I have achieved in life can be attributed to this great borough—the place which formed my aspirations and taught me the lessons of life." As Brooklyn's only community college, KCC has long served as a catalyst for

opportunity and hub of self-discovery for its students, who like Mr. Riggio tend to come from humble beginnings yet dream big.

This Fall, the first recipients of Mr. Riggio's scholarship will arrive at KCC, full of promise yet perhaps uncertain of the way forward. Thanks to this generous gift, they will be able to enjoy the academic rigor, intellectual challenges, and personal growth that are meant to define the college experience, without having to worry about the financial adversity that has for too long imperiled too many students' progress.

In his parting words to the Class of 2019, Mr. Riggio again credited Brooklyn as the place that defined his character, and expressed his hope that KCC graduates adopt their own civic-minded sensibilities as they, too, strive to make a fairer and more equitable society: "My egalitarian spirit sprung from a special, sacred place called Brooklyn. It continues to inform me and make me who I am. I take my work seriously. I take pride in my accomplishments as a citizen. Be kind. Get involved. Be tough. America needs your voice. *You're from Brooklyn.*"

Every month, the Kaleidoscope presents a different facet of the Kingsborough experience—inspiring professors, student success stories, alumni testimonials, exciting new programs, news-making events and much more. We hope you enjoy these stories, and we also encourage you to share *your* unique KCC perspective with us. *Whether you are a current student or an alum, a faculty or staff member, a retiree or a distinguished donor, you also can share your story!*

Help our students overcome their obstacles and achieve their dreams!

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