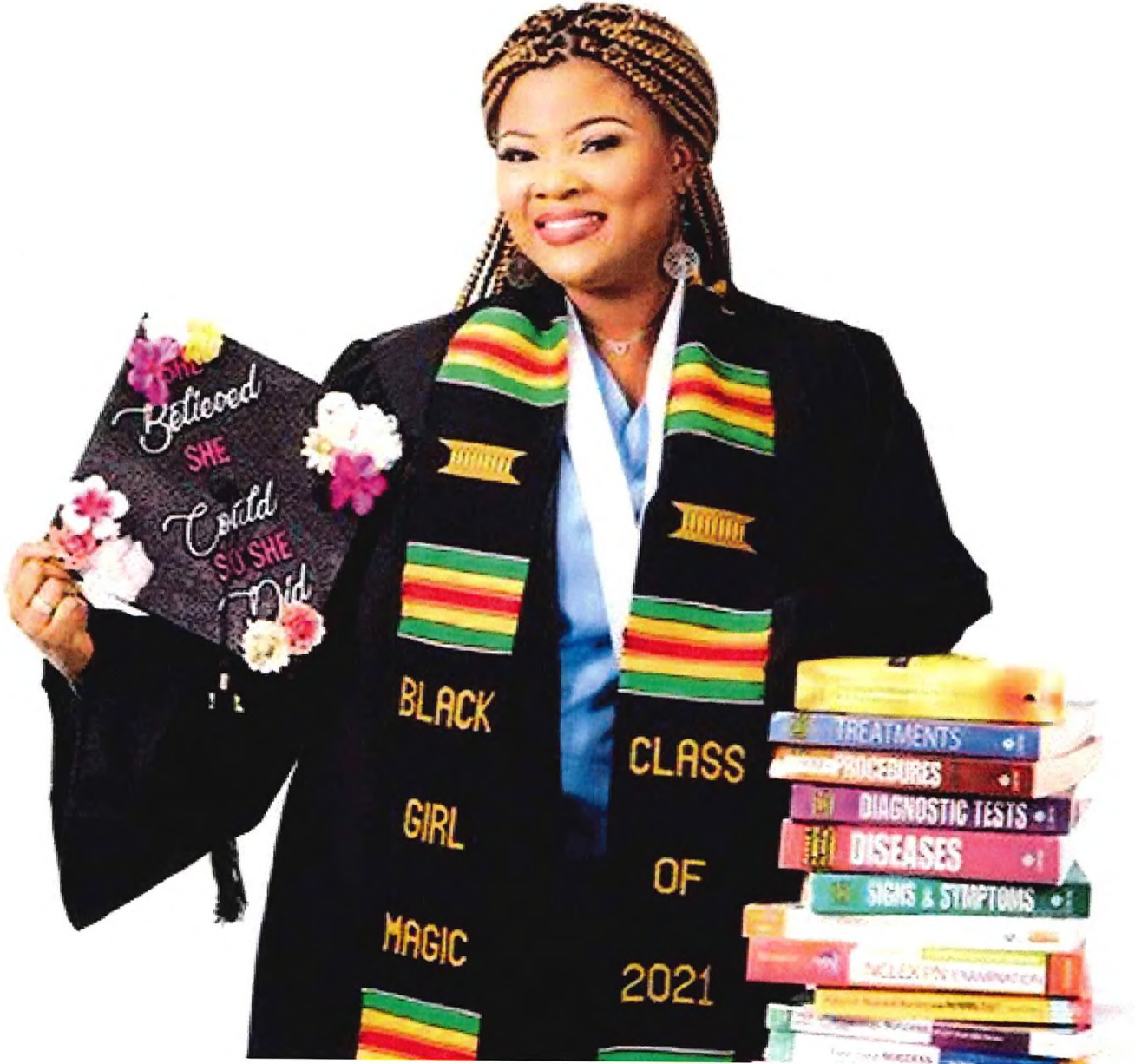


First Literacy scholarship winners receive college degrees

By Madison Mercado Globe Correspondent, Updated May 27, 2022, 8:52 p.m.





Damus Joseph graduated Friday from the University of Massachusetts Boston, with help from a First Literacy scholarship. She finished her coursework in December, 2021, but received her diploma at the Class of 2022 ceremony. FIRST LITERACY

Two scholarship recipients from First Literacy, a nonprofit adult education program in Boston, have added the title of college graduate to their resumes.

Damus Joseph came to the United States seven years ago without a job or any ability to speak English, and Julia Dupere didn't start formal schooling until she was 19 years old.

Joseph, 30, graduated Friday from the University of Massachusetts Boston with a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing. Dupere graduated Thursday from North Shore Community College with an Associate Degree in Applied Sciences with a major in veterinary technology, First Literacy said in a statement.

Now, Joseph works as a registered nurse at Brigham and Women's Hospital, and Dupere is studying to take the Veterinary Technician National Examination this summer.

First Literacy offers college scholarships to adult learners who have completed an adult basic education or English language program in Massachusetts.

Joseph and Dupere each received a \$1,500 scholarship to help them pay for college.

Challenges each graduate faced did not stop either woman from achieving their dreams.

Joseph, born and raised in Haiti, immigrated to the United States to pursue an education after surviving a major earthquake. She started with taking ESOL classes, English for speakers of other languages, at the Cambridge Community Learning Center.

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She was nominated for a First Literacy scholarship in 2017 to help reach her dream of becoming a registered nurse.

Dupere, who grew up in East Boston, stepped into a classroom for the first time when she was 19 years old in the Harborside Community School Adult Education Program.



Julia Depere graduated from North Shore Community College Thursday. FIRST LITERACY

With little formal education behind her, Dupere had to learn to adapt to school norms that were second nature to her classmates.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the new challenge of virtual learning. Still, Dupere persevered to earn her degree in applied sciences with a major in veterinary technology.

“I have always valued education and it’s a privilege to have the opportunity to further it,” Dupere said in the statement. “Growing up I didn’t have that opportunity, and when I was awarded the First Literacy scholarship, I knew this was my chance to learn about something I really cared about - it wasn’t even a question that I wanted to go to college to pursue it.”

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