

AU Student Hurt in Fire Attends Commencement 'In Spirit, if not in Fact'

5/13/00

Alfred, NY -- Andrew Bartholomew, 22, of South Butler, NY, was to have received his degree in business administration today from Alfred University. Instead, he is in guarded condition in Strong Memorial Hospital's intensive care unit, undergoing treatment for burns he sustained in a fire Thursday morning in his apartment at 42 S. Main St., Alfred. "This has been a difficult week for you," the Rev. Laurie DeMott, interfaith advisor for Alfred University's Division of Student Affairs, told graduating seniors at this morning's commencement ceremony. In addition to Bartholomew, 11 other students - seven of them seniors - were in the apartments when they caught fire at 5:30 in the morning. Eight of the 11 were treated for smoke inhalation at St. James Mercy Hospital and released later that morning. Three did not require treatment. "Andrew Bartholomew is with you today, in spirit, if not in fact," said DeMott, who spent Thursday and Friday afternoons with Andrew's parents, Mr. and Mrs. George Bartholomew. Friday, DeMott delivered Andrew's diploma to his parents at Strong Memorial. "It's hanging in his room, because his parents recognize the power of that single piece of paper," said DeMott. "It says, "I have accomplished a great thing, and if I can do that, then I can meet any challenge.'" It is traditional in offering an invocation at commencement to ask for God's blessings upon the assembly, noted DeMott. "The outpouring of love" the AU community has given to Andrew Bartholomew "shows you are already blessed," said DeMott. At Alfred University, each student's name is read and he or she walks across the stage to receive a diploma from President Edward G. Coll, Jr. Andrew couldn't do that, but when his name was read, the crowd that filled McLane Center, including 425 graduates, their parents and friends, rose to its feet to offer Andrew a standing ovation.