

Alfred University Commencement speakers offer a lesson on the value of flexibility

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Richard and Victoria MacKenzie-Childs are congratulated by President Mark Zupan

With the blast from a whistle, a contingent of helpers sprang into action.

A chandelier lighted glided down from the ceiling of the McLane Center at Alfred University on the basketball backboard. Pennants and ribbons unfurled and crisscrossed the Galanis Family Arena where more than 500 Alfred University students, along with faculty, family and friends gathered for Alfred University's 181st Commencement.

A banner appeared in front of the stage, proclaiming "It's about flexibility."

And so it was.

Anyone familiar with the MacKenzie-Childs line of eclectic home goods and how Victoria and Richard MacKenzie-Childs marketed their luxury product with all the flair and dash of a Broadway production could have anticipated what a capacity crowd saw Saturday a spectacle, with an underlying message: Life is about the unexpected. It is all about the flexibility.

In presenting the couple for their honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degrees, Wayne Higby, a noted ceramic artist, educator and now director of the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum, said they "re-envisioned the home décor landscape... Imagine this impossibility: Victoria and Richard took something as ubiquitous as black-and-white checker board pattern and rebranded it as their own."

"For Victoria and Richard, their Alfred University education was key to their phenomenal impact on American cultural style. They combined their education with great imagination and skill. Then they added an empowering, positive attitude with a bountiful and fiercely determined will to create. The result: They revealed and confirmed a compelling truth... home has a distinct, emotional meaning. Home is so much more than an address."

Victoria and Richard MacKenzie-Childs both received their Master of Fine Arts degrees from Alfred University's

acclaimed School of Art and Design, she in 1977 and he in 1978.

They founded MacKenzie-Childs in Aurora, NY, in 1983 and “stepped away” from it more than 10 years ago.