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Patriots owner Robert Kraft, QB Tom Brady congratulate Brandeis students in academic program named in honor of Myra Kraft

Posted by Matt Rocheleau September 24, 2013 07:10 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Patriots quarterback Tom Brady and his son Benjamin made a surprise appearance at the Brookline home of team owner Robert Kraft Tuesday night, to offer praise and congratulations to a group of Brandeis University students enrolled in a program named for the late Myra Kraft.

"[Myra Kraft] was a wonderful woman," Brady told the students. "You guys should be really proud to be under her namesake."

"You guys are the leaders of tomorrow," said Brady, as he held his 3-year-old son. "So you guys are going to be leading little boys like this and little girls like my little girl."

In June, [Brandeis officials announced](#) they would name the university's Transitional Year Program in honor of Myra Kraft. The Kraft family donated \$5 million to the program in Myra's honor.

The one-year academic program helps students who have shown determination to succeed academically, but due to a lack of resources or other reasons, are not fully

prepared for college-level courses.

Many students in the program come from under-resourced high schools and have not had access to AP and honors courses, university officials said. Others have had to work long hours while attending high school, took on family leadership roles in their households or survived a conflict in their native country.

At the private ceremony Tuesday afternoon, Kraft told the students he was proud of them and offered words of encouragement.

"You're in a very great environment," he said. "You're going to have a great opportunity to succeed, and I'm just so proud that all of you are going to bear my sweetheart's name."

"I know that Myra is smiling because she was about making sure everyone in this country has an equal opportunity, and we as a family believe that education is so important as a great equalizer," Kraft told the students.

"I know that some of you have come from difficult backgrounds and maybe where you didn't get a fair shot," he added."

Jermaine Hamilton, a 24-year-old South End native, said he dropped out of high school at age 17.

"I was a student who had irregular attendance, no academic confidence and bad reputations with teachers and staff," he said. "I was desperately looking for the motivation to get back on track with my education."

With help from a dropout and recovery program, he was able to earn a GED.

Shortly after, he found out about the Transitional Year Program at Brandeis and enrolled.

Now, a senior in the program, Hamilton expects that in May he will complete his studies at Brandeis as a double major in sociology and African American studies with a minor in theater. He hopes to next earn a master's degree, become a teacher and eventually an academic administrator so he can help keep other young students from dropping out of school.

"I am living proof, we are all living proof, that the academic opportunity that the Myra Kraft Transitional Year Program provides us with is very important and effective," he said.

"Myra Kraft was exceptional at helping students achieve not just their academic goals but their personal goals as well," added Hamilton. "This program personifies everything that her life was about."

In their first year at Brandeis, students in the program take a mix of undergraduate classes and non-credit-bearing courses designed at the college level, all of which aim to expose students to the challenges of higher educational. The program incorporates small class sizes and support systems for the students.

The program accepts 20 students annually from more than 200 applicants, university officials said. Since its founding 45 years ago, the program has helped more than 1,000 young people prepare for and earn a college education.

Myra Kraft was the daughter of Worcester businessman, Jacob Hiatt, who served as chair of the Brandeis trustee board from 1971 to 1977, and gave generously to the university.

She earned a history degree from Brandeis in 1964, became a trustee there in 1986 and served as vice chair of the board for 10 years.

“She loved Brandeis,” Robert Kraft said at Tuesday’s ceremony.

Robert Kraft recalled how Myra Kraft proposed to him in a parking lot on Brandeis’ campus.

“Brandeis has a very special place for me and is very warm,” he said, explaining why his family recently donated \$5 million to the program. “I wanted to do something that was respectful of her memory and what she was about.”

“Myra Kraft Scholars – you couldn’t find a better brand to be associated with,” he added.

Myra Kraft died of cancer at age 68 in July of 2011.

“I had the privilege of being married to one of the greatest ladies to ever set foot on this planet,” said Kraft. “She was my strength in many ways.”

In May of 2012, Brandeis awarded Myra Kraft an honorary degree, which her husband accepted on her behalf.

At Tuesday’s ceremony, Brandeis President Frederick M. Lawrence unveiled a portrait of Myra Kraft that will be hung on campus.

“She loved the school as a student. She loved the school as an alumna. She loved the school as a trustee,” Lawrence said. “So we talked about the right way to memorialize her and remember her to me it had to be something that captured that spark and that to reach out to people and to let people have a chance to let people have a break.”

To see a video about the Myra Kraft Transitional Year Program, [click here](#).

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at mjrochele@gmail.com. Looking for more coverage of area colleges and universities? Go to our [Your Campus pages](#).



Patriots owner Robert Kraft, Quarterback Tom Brady, and Brady's son Benjamin. Photo by Kayana Szymczak for the Boston Globe

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