Hartford, CT – Capital Community College awarded 545 students with associate degrees and certificates tonight at the Connecticut Convention Center.

Among them was Phil Knecht, at almost 84, the oldest of the graduates. Knecht, a familiar figure at Capital, began as a real estate teacher in Continuing Education. When he turned 65 he started taking classes – one at a time – for 20 years, while he worked in real estate and volunteered for many organizations in the community as well as various political campaigns, encouraging citizens to vote.

“Phil received an honorary degree in 2007, and tonight he will receive the real deal,” said Dr. Wilfredo Nieves, Capital’s president. “Phil has contributed much to Capital as a mentor and a friend to students, faculty and staff. We are fortunate to have him as member of the Capital Community College family and we recognize him for his dedication to lifelong learning and success.” Knecht received a standing ovation from the packed ballroom when his name was announced.

Valedictorian Sidra Soomro spoke about her initial negativity about community colleges when she first arrived at Capital. A first generation college student who came to the U.S. from Pakistan when she was in 4th grade, Soomro wanted the 4 year college experience she saw portrayed on tv. “How could I have known that I would discover my passion and a strength I never knew I had?” she said. “Capital reminded me to be open to new things. Capital made me realize that the knowledge I have is only a small piece of a bigger picture and that I need to dig deeper before I can form an opinion.” Soomro will be continuing her education at CCSU.

Keynote speaker Jocelyn Maminta, health reporter for WTNH Channel 8, talked about “the power and pitfalls of perseverance,” advising graduates to use the struggles they have powered through as motivation. “Draw inspiration from the sweat of your life,” she said. “Do not wallow in self-pity or blame others for your current circumstances.”

Capital Community College, the only public undergraduate college in the city and the only federally designated Hispanic Serving Institution in the state, is an open-door educational institution committed to the metropolitan community it serves. Its mission is to provide higher education and lifelong learning to people of diverse cultures, abilities and ages, and to serve the needs of the community, government agencies and business and industry. ###