There is something truly magical about what we witness today. For those of us fortunate to have the opportunity to work with students here at our University, we know it and feel it. In the daily experience of college we don’t often have the opportunity to step back and to see what our students have become. Today provides that opportunity when we can pause, reflect and celebrate the truly life-changing difference education can make.

Education is about knowledge, and about people and about life. Education is a calling, something that must be experienced to be appreciated. It is also the story of personal achievement, and how talent, hard work, dedication and sacrifice can create remarkable opportunities. Each of our graduates today has a story. I wish that I could tell you each one, as each is meaningful. I would like to share this one special story with you.

In 1987 this student went to college directly after high school, enrolling at Muskegon Community College and Baker College. Perhaps not ready for college, she left after three semesters. She married and began working at the Hearthstone Restaurant in Muskegon where she had many opportunities to grow and learn during her 26 years there. In 2005 she was hired as a paraprofessional in the culinary arts program at the Muskegon Area Career Technical Center. There, instructor Elissa Penczer encouraged her to reenroll at Muskegon Community College, which would help her meet the requirements to keep her new position.

From there she took two classes at Western Michigan University, but things did not come together for that program. Looking for college credit for her many experiences, she enrolled at Ferris in Summer 1999 in the Professional Modularized Teacher Education program, something we know as ProMoTED. ProMoTED is a program designed to offer working students a unique opportunity to earn a Bachelor of Education degree in Technical Education.

In it, students complete the Professional Education course sequence using a blended instructional design that includes intensive direct instruction, on-line education and project-based learning. All courses are offered in one-credit modules. The program is run in cohorts, which begins with an intensive two-week summer semester in face-to-face format. The program continues in the Fall and Spring terms with coursework offered in an on-line format and pre-teaching field experiences. Students then return to campus for another one to two week intensive summer session for additional face-to-face course work. Faculty members Cheryl Thomas, Lisa Ing and Leonard Johnson have helped create this program, are present today and I want to recognize their contributions to ProMoTED.
At Ferris, this student found support for her efforts and an individualized program that fit her needs as a working adult. She especially thanks Lisa Bessemer and Mary Klein for their advice, counsel and support.

Today she graduates with her bachelor degree nearly 24 years from when she first began. She describes herself as a much better student, completing something she very much wanted to do, achieving the goal she had in mind. She has three children currently in college, one who graduated last weekend. She sends special thanks to her husband, Paul, who did so many things so she could go to school. She is appreciative of a program that recognized her work experience and made this dream of a college degree possible for her. Today she graduates with the first cohort of 14 students from the ProMoTED program, a wonderful example of how Ferris State University can provide opportunity through our innovative approaches to education.

I am honored to present Rhonda Derks and would ask that she stand. I would ask that her family also stand and be recognized.

Graduates, as you approach the stage today I would encourage you to reflect back on the education you have received, and the many, many people who have reached out to help you. On behalf of our university I wish you great success, meaning and fulfillment. As each of you sets out on the next step of your life and career you will face times of challenge, heartbreak and disappointment. In those times when you might consider giving up, I’d encourage you to remember this wonderful example of Rhonda Derks and her determination to earn her degree.

Congratulations and best wishes class of 2011.

David L. Eisler
President