There is something truly magical about what we witness here today. For those of us fortunate enough to have the opportunity to work with students 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 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. However, I would like to share one such special story with you.

In 2006 this young man graduated from Bloomingdale High School. Not many people from this small school continued on to college. In fact, the year previous to this person’s graduating class only two students out of a class of 48 continued on to college. However he had a dream of college and enrolled at Ferris in the fall of 2006 in Construction Management. Two years later he realized that his future interests were in a different direction and enrolled in Surveying Engineering.

During the summer of 2008 his girlfriend, Kelli, was diagnosed with leukemia. Each Friday during that academic year he would drive her to Ann Arbor for treatment. Fortunately, the treatment was successful. They married in 2011 and she is now completing her second year as a Pharmacy student at Ferris.

Last year his best friend and fellow Ferris student, Justin Oswald, developed a medical condition which led to losing function in both of his kidneys. No one in Justin’s family was a tissue donor match. Our graduate had offered to do anything he could to help, was tested and learned that he was a 99% match. In February he donated a kidney to his friend. Justin is recovering during this academic year but will return to graduate in Survey Engineering next year.

Our graduate wants to thank the faculty at Ferris. They went out of their way to help him arrange school requirements first when he helped Kelli, and again when he helped Justin. He can’t say enough about their support and their willingness to accommodate the dramatic changes in his life. Without them this day would not have been possible. In addition to recognizing his wife Kelli, he thanks his parents, Don and Karen Smith.

This is a graduate who has helped others in ways that many of us are unlikely to ever experience. As he, himself put it, “You never know what life is going to bring, but take advantage of those
opportunities when they are available.” Next fall he will continue his education, enrolling in the Master of Engineering program at Purdue University.

I am honored to present to you a truly extraordinary graduate, Cory Smith, and would ask that he rise and be recognized. I would ask that his family also rise and be recognized.

Graduates, on behalf of our University I wish you great success, meaning and fulfillment. As each of you sets out on the next step on 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 the example of Cory Smith and the life-changing difference he has made in the lives of others.

Congratulations and best wishes, Class of 2012.