

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Addresses Graduates at Middlesex County College

Gov. Christie Whitman today delivered remarks at Middlesex County College's Commencement. The Governor congratulated students for their accomplishments and encouraged them in their future pursuits.

The Governor honored the Class of '99 by asking them to make an investment of 99 cents. The 99 cents, the Governor said, will buy 3 first class stamps, enough postage to send three letters. The Governor encouraged grads to write Letter Number One to their pasts, addressed to someone who helped shape who and where they are today. Letter Number Two the Governor said should reflect the present day. Writing to someone expressing concern or appreciation is a good way to become involved in democracy.

Finally, the Governor asked students to write a letter for the future addressed to themselves. Write down your goals and dreams, the Governor told them, and see how you're doing five years from now.

Over 800 students graduated from the college today. The college offers associate degrees, certificate programs and non-credit short courses to approximately 13,000 students.

A copy of the Governor's remarks are attached.

REMARKS OF GOVERNOR CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN MIDDLESEX COUNTY COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT EDISON WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, 1999

President Bakum, trustees, faculty, staff, and most of all, graduates of the Class of 1999: Thank you for allowing me to be part of your special day.

And before I say another word, let me join you in applauding the folks who sit behind you now and have stood behind you for so long - your families.

I tried to consult a recent college graduate for suggestions on a topic for my speech to you today. I asked her, "To make a hit with the graduates, what should my speech be about?" She thought for a moment, and answered, "It should be about 8 minutes."

I will try to follow that advice.

Congratulations, Class of '99! Today you graduate from an outstanding county college - one that can keep pace with technology by offering an English course

online but can also keep touch with humanity through service-learning projects that support children and communities in need.

As graduates of Middlesex County College, you continue a tradition of inquiry and achievement. The degree you receive today signifies many things, from the hard work you put in to the new opportunities you take away. It should also be a cherished milestone on what I hope will be a lifelong journey of learning.

Commencement speakers are often expected to dispense lofty advice, such as how to fill your days or which virtues are the most important.

Let me be more practical. I want you to make an investment. And since we've tried to keep county college tuition affordable, I think it's one you can afford.

In honor of the Class of '99, I'm asking that you make an investment of 99 cents. Ninety-nine cents will buy you exactly three first-class postage stamps.

With those stamps, I want you to sit down this week and write three letters.

Now, I recognize that in this day of email and voice mail, you may be out of practice. But as many students showed by taking part in your campus newspaper's wonderful "write to our troops" campaign, the art of letter-writing isn't dead yet.

So start with Letter Number One - a letter to your past. You are here today not solely because of your own skills and determination, as considerable as they are.

Somewhere along the line, someone reached out and inspired you. It may have been a faculty member here at MCC or a teacher back in grade school. It may have been a coach, or a parent, or a friend.

Someone took the time to care. Someone saw in you the potential that you may not have even recognized yourself. Someone helped you get to this moment and deserves to share the joy you feel today. Now is the time to jot a note to say thank you. You can't imagine how much it will mean to that person.

The second letter should be one you write to the present. Write to the governor, or to the head of a company, or to the editor of your local newspaper. Use this letter to begin taking a stand on something that matters to you, whether it's a law you want passed, a candidate you believe in, or a business practice with which you disagree.

Democracy is not a spectator sport. Just ask your fellow graduate, Angela Brandli, who has become a champion of victims' rights. She graduates today with highest honors and will soon attend Douglass College. In the meantime, she will continue to advocate for a victims' rights bill she proposed which is now before the New Jersey Legislature.

Like Angela, each of you has the advantage of a Middlesex County College education. Use it to help make a difference.

The third letter I encourage you to write is a letter to your future. This one you should mail to yourself, to be opened in, say, five years.

Use this letter to set goals. You've proved yourself an achiever by completing your degree at MCC. Now is a perfect time to establish new goals for your life.

You could challenge yourself to continue your learning, whether it's to earn another degree or to learn a new language or to take up the piano. You could set a career goal of reaching a certain level of success in your field. You could set out to climb a mountain or to go back and read for pleasure 10 books you read for class. You could challenge yourself to donate a certain amount to charity, or give an hour a week to volunteering.

Whatever your interests, whatever your dreams, put them down on paper and then check back in five years to see how you're doing. If you have the discipline and the drive, you may be surprised at how much you have accomplished.

At the very least, that letter will invite you to look back upon a day in 1999 when your county college sent you forth, your friends sent you congratulations, and your commencement speaker sent you out for stamps.

Middlesex County College Class of 1999, I salute you and I applaud you.
Congratulations!