

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Addresses Ocean County College Grads Receives Distinguished Service Medal

Gov. Christie Whitman today addressed members of Ocean County College's Class of 1999. The Governor congratulated the graduates on what they have accomplished and encouraged them in what they are yet to do.

The Governor was presented with a Distinguished Service Medal by the college. The Medal recognizes the Governor's contributions to the state and to county colleges.

There are over 950 graduates in the 32nd graduating class of the community college. Approximately 425 students will participate in the commencement exercises. Nearly 7,200 students are enrolled at the college.

Ocean County College is the first of New Jersey's 19 county colleges.

Attached is a copy of the Governor's remarks.

Ocean County College Commencement Address Thursday, May 27, 1999

Dr. Shaw, trustees, members of the faculty and staff, friends, families, and graduates: I am honored to be with you this evening.

Let me begin with two salutes. First, to the mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, and sons and daughters who helped these graduates reach this moment. Your support turned their aspirations into reality. I ask them to join me in applauding you.

Next, of course, I want to salute the graduates. You persevered, you made the grade, and you are ready to face a better future. You make us proud. I ask everyone to join me in acknowledging the graduates of the Ocean County College Class of 1999.

Graduates, as you move on from this campus, the next step may be a job, or more education, or another adventure altogether. Wherever you're going, there are three words I would like to share with you - three words that may help you just a bit on your journey. They are invention, involvement, and investment.

Let's start with invention. Inventions change our lives, and shape our destinies. From the wheel to the nail, the printing press to the cotton gin, the skyscraper to the space station, the pace of invention moves forward at an unbelievable rate.

The U.S. Patent Office now receives almost a quarter of a million applications a year.

But whether or not any of you ever file a patent, that spirit of invention lives in each of us.

Invention is looking at the world with your eyes wide open. It's doing something that's never been done in quite the way you can do it.

It's Timothy Rioux (REE-oh) bouncing back from a career-ending injury to pursue an education at OCC, and getting so involved in his studies that he's receiving three different degrees today.

It's Rutgers graduate Patricia Atkins using OCC to complete the undergraduate science requirements she needs to pursue a master's degree - then enjoying the experience so much she went on for an associate's degree here as well.

Invention is using your God-given power to conceive new solutions. It's seeing the enormous possibilities of the commonplace.

As you make your way into the world - armed with your Ocean County College degree - invent new ways to make your mark in that world. And never stop questioning.

At the same time you pursue invention, strive for involvement. Immerse yourself not just in your chosen profession, but in making the world a better place to live and work.

One path you may follow is public service. You certainly have a wonderful role model in psychology professor David Wolfe, who is a very well-regarded member of the New Jersey State Legislature.

Of course, we live in times when public service is slipping in esteem, and voting is no longer held as a sacred duty. We're plagued with low voter turnout in local, state, and national elections. A few weeks back, New Jersey had its all-time lowest turnout for school board elections - under 14 percent.

Graduates, let me tell you this: big or small, elections matter. Why? Because those we elect are our spokespeople. On our behalf, they make the laws, raise revenue, and decide how best to use our resources.

You elected Shane Grenley your student government president because you believed he would provide the leadership you wanted. You must give the same scrutiny to those you elect outside the academic walls.

Just as you wouldn't send a stranger to represent you at an important meeting, you shouldn't send someone to leadership of the schoolhouse, the state house, or the White House unless you've cast your vote on their worthiness.

And if you think you are too small to be effective, then I say you've never been in bed at night with a mosquito in the room. Elections matter, and our elected officials should be the best we can offer.

Which brings me to the last of the three concepts I wanted to share with you today: investment.

Graduates, today you go forth into the world. Some of you will, no doubt, find jobs quickly and begin your careers. Some of you will continue your education. Some of you will marry and start families.

Regardless of what you do, your world will change. As it changes, you will have to take on greater responsibilities.

Emerson wrote: "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."

I encourage you, no matter what you do, to invest something of what lies within you to improve the world around you. Take time from your schedule - no matter how busy it gets - to do something for someone else.

Take your lead from fellow graduate Monica Vermeuellen, who has done so much in her role as head of your outstanding service fraternity and earned one of the College's first Community Outreach awards. Or follow the example of those on campus who have served as volunteer fire fighters, helped children with cancer, or involved themselves in the United Way.

Do something. Read to a child. Visit someone in a nursing home. Volunteer to run the library book sale. Teach a youngster to sail a kite. Join a church choir. Start a clothing drive at the office. Plant flowers for an elderly neighbor.

It's not what you do, but the doing that counts. It's placing yourself in the context of your community, no matter what community you're part of in the years ahead.

There is a tale of a young man who eagerly described what he dreamed of doing for the poor. A wise man asked the young man, "When do you propose to make your dream come true?" The young man answered, "As soon as the opportunity arrives." "Opportunity never arrives," said the wise man. "It's here."

Members of the Ocean County Class of 1999, the opportunity for invention, the opportunity for involvement, and the opportunity for investment are here today. Seize that opportunity as you follow your dreams.

Go forward into the new millenium knowing that the world is yours to enjoy and to improve.

Invent a world that will be better because you have seen it with new eyes. Involve yourself in a world that will be better because you care to make it all it can be. Invest yourself in a world that will be better because you have given so richly of yourself.

Congratulations, and thank you for letting me share in this special day with you.