

May 5, 2007 Commencement  
College of Business  
President David L. Eisler  
Ferris State University

## **Determined to Succeed**

There is something truly magical about what we will 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. We know firsthand how education has benefited us and at commencement can see how it has transformed our students.

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, of 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 every one is meaningful. I would like to share this very special story with you.

This student was born with a fatty tissue tumor on her spine, an extremely rare form of Spina Bifida. Only a handful of cases like this have ever been reported. This tumor was positioned in such a way that it could not be totally removed without paralysis. During the first 13 years of her life she underwent over 23 surgeries, to remove portions of the tumor as it grew. The last was 21 hours long and she was told she would never walk again. Through hard work and physical therapy 21 days later she walked out of the hospital. In her words, "Everyone was shocked and amazed; that is except for me, I knew I was going to do it." She was born deaf in one ear and blind in one eye. The constant medical procedures had left her behind in her studies. When people believed she might not graduate from high school she did so with honors.

As a result of her surgeries today she has Rheumatoid arthritis which means that she lives with constant pain every day. She also has no feeling in her lower legs. It is a miracle that she can both walk and drive. In college, she had the opportunity to do an internship for the Mecosta County Commission on Aging and Senior Center. Instead of people helping her, here she found satisfaction in helping others. She assisted seniors with their living wills, organized a fundraiser to help them and developed an operating manual for the facility. She enjoyed this opportunity so much that she did it for another semester, developed a survey and applied it to help future generations of seniors. Although her

internship has ended she still goes to the facility to help whenever she is needed and goes into senior's homes to give them company. The seniors have touched her life in profound ways. This is an experience she will never forget and will cherish for the rest of her life.

This remarkable woman considers herself the lucky one because she can walk and she is living her dream. Today she graduates with a Bachelor of Science in Human Resources Management with a minor in Legal Studies. This fall she begins work at Ferris on her master's degree in Information Systems Management.

It is my honor to present to you Tina Van Antwerp and I would ask that she stand and be recognized. I would ask her family also to stand and be recognized.

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 Tina Van Antwerp. In her own words - "Please don't feel sorry for me, but feel inspired by me, and remember if you put your mind to it, you can truly do it."

Congratulations and best wishes.