

NCMC Commencement May 8, 2021:

Keynote Address by Maureen Conley

Thank you, Pres Finley, and Members of the Board, for the opportunity *to speak at NCMC's 61st Commencement Ceremony.*

It is an honor and a privilege.

And it is a distinct pleasure to be here at the **very FIRST "Cruise-In" Drive-Thru Graduation Ceremony.**

I will admit I was a little confused when I learned this would be a

Car-Mencement

You see, when I was a student here, **they didn't enroll cars...**

[Pause]

Pres Finley cleared up my confusion.

He has reassured me that real Graduates are in each vehicle.

[Pause]

So, Congratulations Graduates! I am so excited for you!

You won this race.

You are queued up and ready to cross the finish line. And you will make history when you do.

You are the first class EVER that will pick up your Diploma or Certificate at the new DRIVE-UP WINDOW!

I hope you called in your Order before coming to this Cruise!

I recall the excitement and pride of accomplishment I felt at graduation. And how much it pleased my father.

I am grateful for this college. For the opportunity for a high-quality education that was also affordable

I am thankful for the small Class size and easy access to professors. That was a good learning environment for me.

I was able to build a solid foundation of higher education without leaving my hometown.

Life brings challenges and disappointments.

We learn from those challenges and from our failures.

We learn we didn't do it all on our own.

We had help, and we are grateful.

We learn that helping others brings us joy and satisfaction.

The pandemic brought us fear and isolation.

We learn the importance of Connections and Community.

We suffer when those are severed and lost.

Community is a place where we are valued, not based on our merit, wealth, or position,

Community is found where people have the conscience and confidence to be kind and to act out of love, rather than out of hate, jealousy, or indifference; and they are slow to take offense and willing to forgive rather than to judge and condemn.

When I left Petoskey 45 years ago, I didn't understand or appreciate the value of the Connections and Community I was leaving behind.

It's been 45 years since my graduation, yet during those years I still felt Connected.

You too have made Real Connections here. You ARE part of this Community.

You are Alumni.

You are Timberwolves! And part of the pack!

Whenever you return you can revive that Connection and form new Ones.

NCMC gave us an Opportunity.

We seized that Opportunity and worked hard to achieve our goal.

We have benefitted from the gift of Opportunity.

I hope that will motivate you to give of your time and talent to benefit your community.

Last week a sign caught my attention. It says

"The purpose of Life is to Make an Impact, not an Income"

That sign prompts me to remind you to take time to think beyond the financial rewards of next phase of your journey.

You may be headed to a better job, new career, more education, or a new and completely unexpected opportunity.

Take time to think about the Rewards in life, and which are most important.

Its not wealth or fame. Most of us will not have those.

But we all have potential to make an impact in our Community.

Potential to make a difference in the lives of your family, friends, coworkers, and community.

Solutions to problems don't come from government, they come from individuals.

If we individuals each do our part, however small, TOGETHER we can have a big impact in our community.

Mother Teresa said: ***"I can do things you cannot, and you can do things I cannot. TOGETHER we can do GREAT things."***

She also said: ***"Not all of us can do GREAT things, but we can do small things with great love."***

My Dad had a successful banking career. And he always found time for his family, church, friends, and his neighbors.

He did many small things with love, patience, and kindness.

He was a faithful Catholic. He lived his faith. He believed in the value and dignity of all human life.

He observed the commandment *to love your neighbor as yourself.*

He also found time for his community.

He was a on the Planning Commission, Director of the Chamber of Commerce and Chairman of Fundraising Drives for the March of Dimes Drives and Community Chest, and my personal favorite he was once King of the Lions!

But he did not seek the limelight or credit for his efforts.

If my Dad were here right now. He would be the first to say that

*His were **NOT** GREAT or MIGHTY deeds.*

And the success of those endeavors was due to the combined efforts of all involved, whether small or large.

That is how his small deeds turned into great things that made a difference, an impact on the Community.

This school is One of those great things

In the early 50's there was a large effort by our community to establish a college here in Northern Michigan.

My Dad was on the Feasibility Committee. He was ONE of 100 Members.

And he was ONE of 30 members on the Steering Committee.

In 1958 when the voters of Emmet County voted in favor of starting this college, my Dad was elected to the Board.

He served on that Board until 1980.

Since then, hundreds of individuals have shown selfless generosity by giving their time, talent, and finances to build, refine, and adapt this institution into a tremendous amenity for our small community.

My father had a big impact on my life. He was a man of strong faith and dedicated to his family, his employer, and his community.

He was never quick to judge or overreact. Instead, he was quick to consider the other side of a matter.

I admired his diligence, honesty, humility, and most of all, his ability to forgive.

I observed my father and tried to learn from his example. And I am still trying to do so.

- To listen more than you speak.
 - Ask questions to clarify misunderstandings.
 - Seek to understand others more than you seek to be understood.
 - Forgive, even when its hard
 - Expect more from yourself.
 - Continue to learn and improve your life skills
 - Strive to improve the lives of your fellow citizens.
 - Help in ways that you can. Be creative. Do your way. Pay it forward.
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My Dad had to overcome some challenges.

1. He grew up during the Great Depression.
2. Polio was rampant for the first 35 years of his life.
3. He didn't have a college degree.
4. He was the first in his family to earn a Certificate. (His brother was the first in the family to earn a college degree.)

Depression: The Great Depression was a devastating decade of unemployment, hunger, homelessness, and hardship for the whole country.

Nearly half the country's banks failed.

When banks failed, people lost their savings and lost their farms, homes, and businesses when loans were foreclosed.

My Dad saw entire families working to survive

Neighbors helping neighbor.

And so, the community survived by coming to together.

Like *Timberwolves, the pack survived because the whole pack/community worked together.*

Polio: Polio was an ever-present threat of death or crippling disability.

There were frequent quarantines and shutdowns of schools, playgrounds, public swimming pools. There was no vaccine until the mid 50's.

In 1927 both my dad and his younger brother contracted Polio.

His brother died; my dad survived.

But Polio had paralyzed and weakened the muscles in both legs.

He was fortunate to gain back use of one leg and regain the ability to walk.

College: My Dad did not have the opportunity that we did.

There wasn't even a university in his hometown of Duluth, MN. (And it was a large, thriving industrial city with a population of over 100,000.)

Career:

Dad started in a bank and then became a bank examiner for the US Treasury Department.

To advance he needed more education.

Thankfully a consortium of banking associations had joined forces and established a training course for bankers.

My father completed the 2-year course, while working full time, and earned a **Certificate in Banking**.

Now he had the admission ticket to a whole new future.

In another 10 years he wouldn't have been hired as a banker without a college degree.

During his career as a bank examiner, He uncovered major embezzlements which led to convictions.

One such success was here in Petoskey, at the First National Bank.

When he was offered a position as Cashier at the Bank, he was thrilled, and thanks to his Banking Certificate, he was qualified and able to accept the job.

In closing I will imitate President Kennedy's famous "ask not" phrase from 60 years ago

*"ask not what your country can do for you—
ask what you can do for your country."*

By encouraging you, as you travel your new roads to:

Ask NOT what your COMMUNITY can do for you—

Rather, ask what YOU can do for your COMMUNITY."

Thank you.

God Bless.

Go Timberwolves!

And

start your engines!

Wait, not yet!