

Graduation Speech

Welcome Governor Phil Scott, President Joyce Judy, other visiting dignitaries, parents, friends and the graduating class of 2026 from the Community College of Vermont. I want to personally thank all of you for making this day possible for all of us graduates.

My name is Darrell Martin and I started on this journey over 60 years ago. YES, that is way back in the middle of the last century. I think that the dinosaurs were just barely extinct. The path to get here has had a lot of bumps, forks, u-turns, cliffs and gator infested swamps to navigate through. It all started with an athletic scholarship to Rutgers University in 1965. The first detour was a draft notice during the height of the conflict in Viet Nam. I choose volunteering for Special Forces training and served as a Green Beret with the 10th Special Forces Group serving in Germany and Ft. Devens, Mass. Having been honorably discharged with very few civilian skills led me to the second big bump in the road. After all, jumping out of planes with a 60 pound rucksack and a weapon attached to your hip isn't exactly a skill that you mention in a job interview.

My father had built our house in Latham, NY and passed some of that knowledge on to my older brother and I, so we decided to move to New Hampshire with our supportive wives and start a building construction company. The second home market, with people trying to escape the RAT Race was booming. Our ball was off and running. This lead to building primary residences, but as interest rates rose to almost 20%, that market faltered. (3rd major bump in the road) Don went on to selling Real Estate and I took whatever jobs that I could find.

In the mean time, my wife and I had two daughters and lived in Canterbury, NH, in a house that we had built before things turned bad. We sold that to pay bills and moved to Bow, NH. The kids took a lot of our spare time as there were some medical issues like scoliosis that required trips to Boston Children's Hospital. My time was split between coaching swimming, softball and being the proud parent and working, running my construction company which had expanded to as many as 15 employees and 10 full time subcontractors. Spare time did not exist. And my accountant told me that I paid my foremen more than I paid myself. This all made for a very curvy bumpy ride.

I would be amiss if I did not give some credit to my experience with the Vermont National Guard. On a family trip to the Hopkinton Fair one year, I met a recruiter that mentioned rejoining the Army with my old rank and being a part of the Mountain Infantry. He said that my experiences with Special Forces would help the new young recruits. I agreed and found a home that lasted for over 20 years. Military schools taught discipline, leadership, mountain climbing skills, endurance, communication skills and how to coordinate with all other branches of service.

One of last years student speakers was Thomas Huster and I found that his pathway and mine were similar. He said that "starting college later in life is humbling." Technology is advancing so fast that it hard to keep up, let alone catch up. He and I were surrounded by students that are young to be our grandkids, but had grown up with smart phones, and computers. He said that the classroom technology made him feel like he had landed on another planet. In one class that I attended, the professor was already on the second lesson before I had even gotten logged on to my computer. Both Thomas and I persevered and given enough time, we are proof that you can teach an old dog new tricks. We have found the generation gap a positive thing and relish our younger friends that are juggling a full time job, a family and pursuing a degree. More power to you!

Finishing a college degree is like something that has hung over me for a long time and although a challenge at times have been rewarding. If Billie Jean King can get her Bachelors Degree by 82, so can I.

At this point, I want to congratulate all of the graduates. Many of you are starting on an education that will lead you down lifes many paths while others are changing where you are headed. Furthering your education beyond High School opens many more doors. The skies the limit. Do you want to be one of the first to live in a village on the moon, or help discover a cure for cancer? Might you want to act on Broadway or have a daycare facility that all kids want to go to? Whatever you do, you have taken the first step. Education will come from many different angles. Lifes experiences are one, listening to others is another.

As my British soldier friends would say "God Speed and God Bless"