

Remarks by University of Delaware President Patrick Harker
Spring Commencement
Delaware Stadium
Saturday, May 26, 2012

Good morning! And congratulations to the Class of 2012! You did it!

By the way, we've double-checked the diplomas, and the names are right this time.

My 23-year-old daughter told me you won't listen to anything I have to say today. She's an authority now because she just sat through her own Commencement last year. She said I should just tweet my congratulations, since it's nearly impossible to bore people in 140 characters. I say, "Give it time."

But seeing that I'm one of a few people standing between you and your diploma, I figure you'll at least pretend to listen, and that's good enough for me.

For those of you live-tweeting in the crowd, my Twitter handle is @BestUDPresidentEver.

.....

I started thinking a couple of weeks ago about what I wanted to share with you today—something about leaving a legacy.

And then Mark Zuckerberg turned 28 on a Monday; orchestrated the 3rd-biggest IPO in history that Friday; then married his longtime girlfriend over the weekend. Not bad for a college dropout. We're all part of Mark Zuckerberg's legacy. In fact, every year, my first piece of advice to new freshmen is: "Be careful what you post on Facebook."

.....

But "world domination" isn't the only worthwhile legacy. And it seems a little presumptuous for me to tell *you* about legacy-leaving when among the thousands of you sitting here, so many legacies are already left, taking up as much space in this Stadium as bodies.

There's the legacy of perseverance: In December, **Elanor Sonderman**, an anthropology major, was one of two students hit by a car on Cleveland Ave.—multiple fractures in her legs; shattered bones that had to be pinned and bolted back together. Virtually no part of Elanor—inside or out—escaped injury.

From her hospital bed, she sent word to professors that she wanted to finish her coursework and needed to start her grad school applications. This semester, she balanced a full course load, extra-curriculars, and service hours against a brutal physical therapy regimen. Incredibly, Elanor's graduating on time today, and she's been accepted into a PhD program this fall.

There's the legacy of intellectual curiosity: Professors cite the complexity and originality of **Hannah Shearer's** academic work. They say the art history, art conservation double-major

already has the mark of an exceptional curator or conservator, that she'll create new knowledge in art and material culture.

But Hannah's ambitions are broader than that. Her plan is to help people protect their culture and their history; she even created a disaster plan for the National Museum of Denmark while studying abroad there last fall. She wants the world to understand why heritage and identity matter so much, and what we all gain in their preservation.

There's the legacy of engagement: You'll almost always find English & human services double-major **Shane Palkovitz** with his guitar.

- Shane and his guitar in Pretoria, South Africa, where he studied economic displacement and ethnic dislocation, and played for anyone who wanted to hear and with anyone who wanted to join in.
- Shane and his guitar in a Wilmington elementary school, where he'd teach children some basic techniques and simple songs.
- Shane and his guitar in some of the area's poorer neighborhoods, where he'd hang out and talk with kids—just to be present and connected, a witness to their experience.

There's the legacy of entrepreneurship: **Leigh Ann Tona** is a management major who noticed two things. One: South Campus is full of students and student-athletes. And two: You can't get much food down here. Enter "I Don't Give a Fork," Leigh Ann's food truck soon to be parked on S. College. Her legacy is the sandwich—like the "Mac & Cheesesteak" and the "Freshman 15."

I Don't Give a Fork tied for best venture in our semi-annual business pitch competition—tied with a nanotech innovation that tags dividing cancer cells so therapies can be better targeted. So—yes—anything really is possible.

There's the legacy of service: While in Haiti, computer science major **Eric McGinnis** helped develop a translation app enabling Haitian women, native Creole speakers, to communicate and email in English. The service trip was part of an effort to foster learning among women and children in remote areas of Haiti. To create a sustainable program, the group trained young women as mentors, so they could continue teaching village children after their U.S. visitors had gone.

I went to Haiti in January, and I saw what sustained commitment can do. The sustained commitment of your generation: Nearly 2½ years after Haiti's earthquake, you haven't forgotten. You haven't forgotten the people or the cause. You haven't forgotten your humanity, or what's possible when one community unites around helping another. And you're helping a great deal.

You're leaving many legacies together. What happens when you herd 2,500 students into a gym, dancing and sweating nonstop for 12 hours? You raise nearly half-a-million dollars to cure childhood cancer and help families living the indescribable pain of it. Everyone connected to UDance was a hero to someone that day. Everyone who danced left a legacy.

But legacies aren't all or nothing. Perseverance doesn't have to mean you fought through broken bones to a diploma. It can mean you kept taking a failed course until you didn't fail it anymore, or you stuck it out in a job when things got harder than you thought they would.

Curiosity doesn't have to mean you're an intellectual trailblazer. It can mean you're open to new pursuits, new things that interest you, without ever dreaming of virtuosity in them.

Your path didn't start at UD, and it won't end here. Your life is a continuum, with plenty of chances to be the person you want to be and—fortunately for all of us—plenty of second chances, too. Be kind, be gracious, be interested, be honest, be a hard worker and a good friend. Be a little daring. If you leave your section of the world at least as good as when you got there, you've left a pretty solid legacy.

Oh, and before I forget: #Congrats2012BlueHens!