COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

FOR

ROBERT REGAN

CORRECTIONS MADE 4/7/13 (HS 4/7-I left in most of the original text with ~~strike-through~~ so that you can see the changes).

Hello everyone! It is such a privilege to be here with all of you today, celebrating this year’s graduates, the Class of 2013 of Mount Wachusett Community College. Today is even more special as we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the first graduating class of “The Mount.” It is so great to be back and to see familiar faces and new ones; family, friends, faculty and all of you, our truly distinguished guests. It was a great honor to be invited to speak today, and I promise you, if **anyone** had **ever** told me that I would be returning twenty four years later, let alone to speak at your commencement ceremony, I don’t think I would have ever really believed or envisioned it, but here I am, and **THAT**, my friends, is a simple yet really meaningful demonstration of the power of determination, gratitude, and appreciation for education and wisdom! I also have to say that being invited to speak by, and seeing Dean Vincent Ialenti is pretty special as well. Dean Ialenti was my first professor when I got to this school, and here we are, and here **HE** is. From Professor to Dean…(**turn to him and say**), Dean Ialenti, you did good!!! (**Wait for the laugh**). All jokes aside, Dean Ialenti is also a testament to hard work and complete dedication to his students. I know that I would not have had the determination and drive to allow myself to be challenged to succeed if it weren’t for the inspiration I received from teachers like this fine man. Someone else that I really am honored to acknowledge today is President Dan Asquino. I originally met Dan (**Is it appropriate to call him that? If not, use the term you would normally use-President Asquino?**) in 1989 when I was asked to speak as the recipient of the first Alumni of the Year Award. I was humbled and honored back then, and now, twenty-four years later, I am still, well, I don’t exactly want to say **speechless**…. **THAT** would kind of defeat today’s purpose!!! (**Wait for the laugh**), so let’s just say that I’m more than a little moved by the significance of this moment. What is even more gratifying is that President Asquino remembers that first meeting we had, and that tells me what a gift it is to have someone like him as our mentor and guide through our college careers and ultimately, throughout our lives. To Vincent Ialenti and Dan Asquino, thank you both for your guidance, lessons, and perseverance. I know that when we’re younger, we tend to take such “mentorship” for granted, but I am living proof that when a student is inspired and motivated, amazing things can happen in life.

I’m no high profile celebrity nor am I a seasoned politician. I am a person, just like you, who spent his early years learning, playing and planning what to do with my life as I grew up and lived in this community. There’s something to be said for the roots one nurtures in the “early years,” and a person can travel the world and be exposed to experiences of a lifetime, but there is **nothing** like coming back to where it all started, and for me, and **YOU**, that’s right here. There was an old commercial that ran in New York many years ago. It was actually a commercial to advertise the New York State Lotto, but the tagline resonates with my early story. It simply stated, “All you need is a dollar and a dream.” That’s exactly what it took to move me-literally, to my classes. Back in 1973, many of my contemporaries were the first generation in their respective families to attend college, and there I was, Robert Regan, a young Irish kid who wanted an education. I began my “stint” at Wachusetts in style- I took that dollar and bought a neighbor’s 1965 black Buick Special because I knew, some way; somehow, I had to get to school. I really was hungry to learn. Okay-sounds glamorous and “retro” and nostalgic, no? In Hollywood, they might choose this time to “cue the misting machines”…but in truth, the car had four wheels and a steering wheel, and not much else. No power steering, and okay, a little bit of the floor was missing on the driver’s side, but that’s the way we rolled in those days. I like to think of it as my “Fred Flintstone years.” (**Wait for the laugh**). At least the radio worked, and I remember driving along Route 2, listening to that radio, determined to complete my education, and get my degree, or at least a job.

Ya know what? Determination pays off! Here I am, all these years later, and as I look back, I think of those days, what motivated me and where it’s all taken me. I also think of all of **YOU**. No matter what you choose to do with your lives, do your best to make informed choices. Don’t be afraid to make mistakes. Remember that a mistake is still proof that a result was produced. Learn to take responsibility and be accountable for your actions. **I am sure that each one of** you graduates have **had** an incident that ~~you’d like to share~~ **you will never forget** that **involved** a really big mistake you made, **and believe me, if you can’t think of any mistakes you’ve made up to now, just wait!!! Life is full of “opportunities” to self-correct.** **Think about how you handled that incident at the time. Did you take responsibility??? Or did you feel too embarrassed to accept what you did and then make the correction?** **Most importantly, did you really learn from the experience?** **Think of all of that mortification and embarrassment and then remember the words** ~~Tell us about it and it will set you free!! Make ‘em really big!! (~~**~~After you get one or two seemingly “catastrophic” confessions, you can say~~**~~) Wow!! Those got pretty dramatic!!!~~ ~~But I want you to listen to and remember the words~~ of Jerry Zucker, the great movie producer and director, who, in his 2003 Graduation Speech at the University of Wisconsin, said, "Nobody else is paying as much attention to your failures as you are... To everyone else, it's just a blip on the radar screen, so just move on." **Just move on.**  Learn from your mistakes. Remember to put in the correction that will insure that you don’t do **THAT** again. Concentrate on your goals. **Focus. You are probably your own worst critic, but I encourage you to be your most ardent fan and supporter as well.** Keep your eyes on the prize, which is your achievements, and ultimately your success. Also remember that everyone else is also too concerned about what **they’re** doing and how **they** look to dwell on **YOUR** failures. **Really**. Move on.

As I said, I am not famous or particularly witty, but I have learned how to pay attention and how to learn from, and be inspired by, others. There are many moments of brilliance attributed to others, their words used to inspire young graduates, so indulge me for a moment, if you will. Our world would literally not be the same place were it not for the vision of Steve Jobs, the late, great CEO and Co-Founder of Apple. His vision revolutionized the way we connect and communicate. He may not have been the most loved person on the face of the earth, but his determination and vision have made an extraordinary impact on our society and civilization. I mean, I’m just thankful that you’ve taken your eyes off your Iphones even for a couple of minutes to listen to me!! (**Wait for the laugh**). I was even thinking that maybe, instead of offering a written transcript of this speech after this ceremony, I would just do a text blast of the contents!! That would probably be a **REAL** first for the Mount-don’t you think? (**Wait for the laugh**). But seriously, getting back to Steve, he said, “Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition.” Have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. That’s another way of saying, “Be present.” Pay attention. Ask questions. So often we follow a path just by placing one foot in front of the other. Just because. But you know what? There may be a purpose in that path you choose, step by step, but unless you pay attention and make sure you are informed about your choices and tests in this world, you will not knowingly live **YOUR** life, and if **YOU** don’t know it, then who will?

And lastly, I want to share the zany reality that is the wit and wisdom of Ellen DeGeneres. When she spoke at Tulane University in her hometown of New Orleans, in May of 2009, she poignantly said, “Follow your passion, stay true to yourself, never follow someone else's path... unless you're in the woods and you're lost and you see a path then by all means you should follow that.” (**Wait for the laugh**) Practical advice. Remember it! And right along with that inspirational quote comes some twisted but oddly appropriate advice from the legendary baseball coach, Yogi Berra, who said, “You’ve got to be very careful if you don’t know where you’re going because you might not get there.” (**Wait for the laugh**)

Yes. Each one of you is going somewhere, and the destination is now in **YOUR** hands. You’re about to walk through those doors for the last time-as students. Remember my story-you never know when you’ll be back, but to return and see the legacy **YOU’VE** inspired is a truly great gift. Just look at me and all that I have gotten out of my education and affiliation with the Mount. I allowed myself the privilege of appreciating my education. I chose the field of communications and when you think of it, ultimately, that is at the root of all human connection. Every gesture we make is a form or communication, so I suggest that you hone your skills and focus on interaction. I let my education sink in and I take those lessons and remember to keep learning, and those lessons have served me well. (**If you want to mention a few of your accomplishments, do that here**.) At the beginning of my career, I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and as I got more experience, I was able to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Now, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years later, I find myself really motivating people through my work at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and my appointment at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. As I go on through life, I truly believe that “I don’t know what I don’t know,” but I **do** know that the real prize in life is that every day we get to be exposed to, learn from, and be challenged by new ideas. Communication is the key to success in every facet of life. The world is moving at a very rapid pace and it is up to each one of us to keep up with the times, because they will change, whether we like it or not. Our best defense for the future is knowledge, self-awareness, confidence and determination, and I wish all the best to each one of you as you make your way on your unique path in life. Congratulations to all of you and I look forward to seeing you all in another 24 years – or sooner!! as **YOU** inspire **US** with your adventures in learning and life!! Thank you all and may your goals become reality!