COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

FOR

COSMO TERRIGNO

Hello everyone and welcome to the commencement exercises for the Woodland Country Day School Class of 2015! I would like to thank all of you for being here and whether you are a parent or family member of one of today’s graduates, a friend or supportive guest, a distinguished citizen of our community or an esteemed member of our faculty or administrative staff, one thing is very clear about this year’s class. All of you students are terrific!! As I look around at all of you that are about to officially leave our charge, I see a bright, promising, diverse and talented group of young people. While some of you may have recently joined the class and others of you have literally spent almost your entire childhood with us, entering and beginning your learning careers in pre-kindergarten, it is so refreshing to recall the camaraderie that exists between all of you. Whether you are a music lover or actor, an excellent writer or gifted, accomplished orator, a capable debater or a potential scientist, each one of you is a unique, bright spot that is about to be launched into the world, ready to make your mark and light the way to the future.

This is the time in your lives when you stand at the precipice… at the edge of childhood and the entry point to young adulthood. At WCDS we have done our best to fulfill our mission, which as you know is, “Woodland is dedicated to educational excellence for its students in an environment that builds self-esteem, confidence and respect for others.” It is with great pride and consideration for all that lessons are planned and extra curricular activities are designed to support each one of you in fulfilling that mission from your own special point of view. You may still be a little young to realize something and that is that the way you demonstrated your respect for one another can work as a catalyst to change the world. This may be a little bit of a hard concept to grasp right now, but as the world gets faster, more informed and more connected, it will be the responsibility of everyone to find effective ways to accept and honor one another while learning to coexist on this earth. When I look at this class I am gratified to see such a group of principled, considerate young people who are open minded, accepting, and truly appreciative of their peers. Remember the lessons you’ve learned here. You are in the process of building a foundation of knowledge, wisdom, creativity, and tolerance and those lessons will serve you throughout your lifetime.

Another thing that I have observed in the interactions within our class of graduates is your admirable dedication to honesty. Although on rare occasions sometimes so much honesty may serve to inspire other predicaments, your commitment to speak the truth and to seek justice runs deep. Dedication to uphold the truth at such a young age is rare and admirable and worthy of encouragement. It is more proof that the basic principles of integrity and ethics are alive and stand a good chance to be carried into the future by a core group of caring, intelligent young people. We all know that Benjamin Franklin said, “Honesty is the best policy,” but did you know that Thomas Jefferson said, “Honesty is the first chapter in the book of Wisdom?” The time is now to learn and practice the principles that will foster inner strength as adults.

If we look a little deeper into the camaraderie and sense of belonging and connection that really personified this group, I must say that it has also been inspiring to witness just how much you admire one another and are willing to learn from each other. That you are relatively young and yet have the ability to learn by example from your peers as opposed to possibly being envious of another’s accomplishments is worth recognizing. The love and affection that you freely demonstrate by your support for the students in the lower classes like kindergarten clearly shows all of us that our students are managing to live their lives inspired by the basic fundamental principles fostered here at Woodland and continued at home. By always keeping in mind that these standards need to be observed and upheld in **all** phases of life… not just at school but at home as well, our graduates will have a stronger chance to succeed in life. Keeping in mind the words of the Ancient Greek philosopher Plato, “Good actions give strength to our selves and inspire good actions in others, “ I would say that all of you are definitely on the right path to adulthood.

Of course all of you are eager to go on to the next phase of your education and this is a very exciting time for you. High school awaits and it will be a whole new experience-new locations, new teachers, new classmates, new educational hills to climb and conquer. As we take a look back at Woodland’s alumni in past years and learn from their collective experience, we know that you’re leaving this school as prepared as you can possibly be. As you leave Ivy Manor each of you carries an invisible toolbox filled with confidence, knowledge, the ability to express yourselves and to articulate your goals and purpose in life. You are ready to approach, absorb, and conquer the lessons that build on what you’ve learned here as you prepare to become productive members and leaders of the future. Remember you are leaving the halls of this fine institution but you have earned a place in its history. We look forward to hearing of your progress and accomplishments and each one of you is always welcome to return and to share your achievements in order to encourage the next classes of dedicated Woodland students. In turn they will learn and grow from the adventures you are about to experience in the next phases of your lives.

As I observe this class I am also gratified to know that your lives are positively impacted not only by our mission but also by the message invoked in our school prayer. Each one of you exemplifies the principles that we work so diligently to uphold. Remember to take these words and continue to use them to guide you through school and life… they belong to each one of you now… “Keep us ready to help others at some cost to ourselves. Forgive us when we are unkind and help us to forgive those who are unkind to us.”

We want you to keep something else in mind as you go on to learn your lessons and then conquer the world. Throughout the time that you were learning and growing, so was Woodland Country Day School, in fact the lesson here is that we NEVER stop learning. The people who will truly succeed in this life are those who know and fully realize that our entire lives are spent in absorbing the lessons we need to learn in order to live fulfilled lives. As you take your lessons and observe each other in order to be inspired to move on to the next levels of your lives, we as adults and educators do the same thing. In reality, this commencement ceremony is an acknowledgement of how we, the adults grow as parents, educators and administrators. We learn by observing your progress and by encouraging what works and is effective and acknowledging what needs improvement. We are proud of the growth we see that is fostered by our teaching methods and supportive environment and we are humbled as we attain further stature within the educational community. This year was very significant at our school. We completed our dual accreditation with the Middle States and the New Jersey Association of Independent Schools. Every branch of our Woodland family came together to support our “Gem of the Woods” achieving that goal and it would not have been possible without you. Just as Woodland is about encouraging and educating the whole person, our educational community embraces, acknowledges and appreciates the endorsement of all of you. Needless to say, such a global sense of encouragement and unity did not go unnoticed. Esteemed educators and committee members from as far away as Princeton, Chatham, and Silver Springs, Maryland were infinitely impressed and embraced our entire school community including all who teach, administrate, learn and lead, and that includes **YOU**.

You have come a long way since you first walked through the doors of Ivy Manor and you’ve got a long way to go. As I said earlier, we look forward to the day when you return with stories of how your Woodland education inspired discovery, experience and ultimately your own unique successes, and know that sometime in the not too distant future, we hope to see **your** legacy… as you return to see your children standing on the front porch of Ivy Manor eager to lay the foundations for their future education. That may seem almost unimaginable to you right now, but rest assured, as you continue through life you will be amazed at how you’ve grown. Through those observations may you continue to inspire and be inspired by all that crosses your paths. Congratulations and thank you all for being a part of Woodland Country Day!