Ferrum College celebrates 99th commencement

260 graduates received diplomas during ceremony

Wednesday, May 13, 2015

Twenty-seven Franklin County residents were among the 260 graduates of Ferrum College Saturday during the school's 99th annual commencement ceremonies for the Class of 2015.

Under a sunny sky, the 260 graduates received their diplomas during a ceremony in Hart International Plaza, which also included the presentation of student, faculty and alumni awards and a keynote address by Dr. Nathaniel L. Bishop, president of Jefferson College of Health Sciences.

The senior class speaker was Melanie Rooks.

"Be grateful always to God and to your family," Ferrum College President Jennifer Braaten told graduates during her opening remarks. "Be thankful always for the opportunities you have had and will continue to have as you continue from this point forward to wonderful things. And be hopeful that you are part of the building of a better world."

"I am incredibly proud of your successes and the contributions you’ve made to the college and community during your years at Ferrum, as well as of our faculty and staff who taught, mentored and supported you throughout those years," Braaten added.

Among the award recipients was Robert W. "Bob" Todd ’67, who received the Benjamin M. Beckham Medallion, the college's highest alumni honor. Named after the college's first president, Dr. Benjamin M. Beckham, the Medallion is awarded to alumnus or alumna who exemplify in an exceptional manner the Ferrum motto, "Not Self, But Others."

Todd, who is a trustee of the college and served as chair of the Institutional Advancement Committee and as chair of the Centennial Campaign, explained to graduates that he and the other board of trustees members do what they do because "we believe in you, not just for what you've achieved so far during your years here, but for what you will achieve and what you will become."

In his address to the graduates, Bishop used an arrangement of irises to help convey his message. Bishop explained that each time he and his wife have moved since first receiving the irises from friends, they've made it a point to move some of the irises with them.

"Each time we moved them, they took root in different soils...and continued to turn out vibrant, bright and living colors...and they speak to our journey. In your life beyond this wonderful campus you, too, will continue to have as you continue from this point forward to wonderful things. And be hopeful that you are part of the building of a better world."

"I was taught to always give my best wherever and whatever I was doing and it has served me well," he said. "It is part of my DNA to view every problem and challenge as an opportunity. Every closed door as the impetus for creating and opening new doors and every glass is viewed not half empty, but half full."

"Remember and incorporate into your life those principles that have stood the test of time and that have been-lovingly handed down to you. Strive to make a difference. Strive to do good and make this world a better place...and always strive to simply do the right thing," Bishop added. "Do good and live out this great college motto, 'Not Self, But Others'. Build upon those basics, and like these irises, take root, take hold and bloom wherever and whatever you do."

After Senior Class President Anneliese Álvarez presented Dr. Braaten with the senior class gift, Student Government Association President and senior class speaker Melanie Rooks opened her remarks with the poem "I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings" by Maya Angelou and by giving thanks.

"I would like to thank God for all of his many blessings and the favor that He has shown each and every one of us because we did not make it here on our own," she said. "Ferrum College administration, faculty, staff, special guests, parents, families and all other loved ones, thank you for not only being here with us to celebrate this monumental occasion, but for each and every act that you performed to help us get to this juncture."

"Never forget we have the power within ourselves to release ourselves from any cage that is holding us captive," she added. "I want you to unlock the door, free yourself from restraints, stretch your wings and

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soar higher than ever before so that we may fly freely into the land of tomorrow."

After Braaten conferred the bachelor degrees to the graduates, the ceremony was followed by a picnic lunch on the lawn for graduates and their guests.