Events

Special Edition—Fall Commencement, 1997

Mary Good was presented with the Dean’s Medallion by Dean Ted Bickart. Good is a member of the National Academy of Engineering, the National Science Board (under Presidents Carter and Reagan), the National Science and Technology Council’s Civilian Industrial Technology Committee, and the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences. She has received such honors as “Industrial Research and Development” magazine’s Scientist of the Year; the National Science Foundation Distinguished Public Service Award, and the Industrial Research Institute Medalist Award.

Good’s remarks Friday evening centered on three attributes that, in her view, are essential to our country’s continued technological growth. Citing some of history’s more pronounced economic upswings and downturns, Good notes that when we are willing to take risks; when we possess a well-grounded understanding of current technologies and how they affect our society; when we have the determination to see an idea through while maintaining our ideals and our dignity, the United States is able to achieve its economic potential. Confidence, knowledge, and courage, she declares, are paramount to our prosperity.

Good went on to propose several ways to integrate these key attributes into the national consciousness. Among other things, she suggests that a quality education for all people be of utmost priority, that a fiscal policy be endorsed that responsibly balances investment with future return, and that a commitment to rebuilding and renewing at home be upheld through, as she describes, “service in all its aspects.”

“We need to move from the ‘me’ generation of the ‘80s to the ‘us’ generation of the ‘90s,” Good says.

Prior to her remarks, Good was presented with an honorary doctor of science degree by Robert Huggett, vice president for research and graduate studies, acting on behalf of Michigan State University.

Good received the Dean’s Medallion at the early-morning breakfast the following day, attended by deans of the Colleges of Engineering, Natural Science, and Social Science, as well as professors and chairpersons representing the Departments of Chemical Engineering, Chemistry, Electrical Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering. The director of the National Medal of Technology was also in attendance. Good is the ninth person to be honored with the Dean’s Medallion since its origin in 1991.

Mary Lowe Good, speaker at Michigan State University’s fall 1997 commencement ceremony for graduate candidates, was presented the Dean’s Medallion by Dean Bickart on Saturday, December 6 at a breakfast in her honor. The Dean’s Medallion is awarded to individuals who have made significant contributions in the field of engineering through their wisdom, their invention, their determination, and their leadership.

Good, a managing member of Venture Capital Investors in Little Rock, Arkansas, is one of the most respected voices in the country in the area of science and technology development. Throughout her 40-year career, Good has held leadership posts in academia, industry, and government, and, for this reason, her contributions in the fields of chemistry and materials science have been profound and far-reaching. She has served as under-secretary for technology for the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Technology Administration; senior vice president of technology at Allied-Signal, Inc.; and professor of chemistry at the University of New Orleans and professor of materials science at Louisiana State University, where she achieved the university’s highest professional rank, Boyd Professor.

For a third year, the Department of Computer Science hosted a breakfast to honor its bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degree recipients. The December 6 breakfast was sponsored by Crowe, Chizek & Co., Oak Brook, Illinois.

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Remarks of John F. Smith, Jr., Chairman and CEO of General Motors, to the Fall 1997 Baccalaureate Recipients

President McPherson: distinguished faculty, younger brothers and sisters who are worried the graduates are going to want their old bedrooms back; parents who are worried the graduates will want their old bedrooms back; grandmothers getting their handkerchiefs ready; boyfriends, girlfriends, friend friends; and most important of all, new graduates of Michigan State University.

I am absolutely delighted to be part of this special day. And thank you for this degree. I feel truly honored.

Before I do anything else, I want to congratulate you on graduating from such a fine school. And I know the 3,000 MSU alumni who work at General Motors would want me to extend their best wishes also.

A diploma from Michigan State University prepares you to go anywhere and do anything in your field—and you should be very proud of the degree you are receiving. And I would say that even if you hadn’t beat Penn State. My son Kevin and daughter-in-law Sally, who are in the audience, met on campus here and graduated from MSU. And so being here today feels very much like a family affair to me.

That’s the part I’m a little sheepish about. Perhaps I was influenced by an old Irish lady who lived in our neighborhood in Worcester. She had no use for big cities. She always used to say that the higher the buildings, the lower the morals. Fortunately, someone from the treasurer’s office finally came up and talked me into leaving Massachusetts, moving to New York, and taking the job.

Looking back on it, I can see that I grew up not really understanding or appreciating the wider world. To succeed, you must think much more expansively and globally than I did when I graduated—and that is regardless of the field you are in. Because no matter what you do, to excel, you need ideas—and the very best ideas are not always those in your own backyard.

In the past year, I have been to Switzerland, China, Canada, Ukraine, Mexico, Hong Kong, Spain, Turkey, Chile, India, Greece, Japan, and Germany. Two days ago, I got back from London for the second time this year. In three days, I leave for Argentina and Venezuela. And then the week after that, I go to Kenya, where we have a plant.

That is a typical year.

We sometimes forget that the United States makes up only four percent of the world’s population. The reason I travel so widely is that much of the economic future is beyond the borders of the United States. That is where most of the economic growth will come in the years ahead. This does not in any way lessen the prospects for America’s future. In fact, this is a great time to be graduating in the United States, and in Michigan in particular. We are enjoying the highest employment and lowest inflation rates in decades, making this one of the best times in recent history to be entering the labor force. You might even say I’m a bit envious.

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Closer to home, the automobile is enjoying prosperity. A vast expansion of economic freedom has been set loose by historic, irreversible forces—forces both political and technological. We see governments redefining their economic roles as they reduce trade barriers and liberalize their economies. With the end of the Cold War, the United States became the only military superpower. The recent turmoil in Asia shows that we are also the only economic superpower. So I am very optimistic about your futures, and about America’s future, if we remain an open, flexible, free-trade society.

Needless to say, there are tremendous opportunities and changes associated with this global trend. General Motors, for example, intends to increase our output outside North America by two-thirds in the next ten years. By the year 2005, we expect our international operations to surpass the size of our North American Operations. Coca-Cola, Intel, and a number of well-known U.S. corporations already get a majority of their sales and profits from overseas. Right now, GM has five major plants under construction in Argentina, Poland, China, Thailand, and Brazil. This is in addition to the scores of plants already spread across the globe.

Or take McDonald’s. McDonald’s is opening nearly five new foreign restaurant outlets a day. I read recently that of the 20,000 McDonald’s outlets on the planet, 25 of the top 50 in sales are in Hong Kong. (By the way, this might be of special interest to the nursing graduates—since McDonald’s arrived in Hong Kong, the average weight of the Hong Kong teenager has risen 13 percent.)

And it is not just hamburgers and automobiles that are becoming global. So is the very concept of work itself. USA Today ran an interesting piece a while back about how technology is ‘demolishing’ distance. It told about a group of computer programmers employed by IBM at a university in Beijing. Their job is to write software. At the end of each day, they send their work over the Internet to an IBM facility in Seattle. There, programmers build on it and send it via Internet to programmers in Belarus and Latvia in the old Soviet Union. From there, the work is sent farther east to India, which then passes the software back to Beijing by morning. Then the cycle repeats itself. One of IBM’s technology experts says, “It’s like we’ve created a 48-hour day.”

Americans have absolutely nothing to fear from this trend. In fact, the fear should come in not being part of it. In one of the speeches I gave when I was in India a few weeks ago, I told about a young fellow named Sanjiv Sihu, who had come to the United States from Hyderabad in the mid-1980s. He started a software company in his Dallas apartment, took the company public, and he’s now worth $400 million. He also made 25 of his employees millionaires.

Now, my point is not about personal wealth. My point is this: That young man came here to the United States and created wealth and jobs because we are open to the world. And that is my hope for you today—to remain open to the world. I urge you not to fear the global trend that will only be increasing in the years ahead.

Let me close by leaving you with a statistic. I came across the other day. If the earth’s entire population were proportionally shrunk to a village of 100 people, do you know how many would not be able even to read? Seventy. Of those 100 people, only one would have a college education.

You have a tremendous role to play in this world. You can see the world and its trends and its needs from a far larger and more open perspective than most. You have an obligation—and an opportunity—to think expansively and broadly. I urge you to be open to the world as you begin your careers.

Graduates, speaking for every one of us in this room, you have our highest hopes, our best wishes for success, and our warmest congratulations.

*Information excerpted from September 2, 1997 issue of USA Today, “Technology is ‘demolishing’ time, distance.”*