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Fricke Urges Graduates at Commencement to Go Beyond Greed

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Illinois Wesleyan University graduates and their families gathered to celebrate the 159th Commencement ceremonies on Sunday, May 3 on the Robert S. Eckley Quadrangle.

President Richard F. Wilson congratulated the 516 graduating seniors of the 2008-2009 school year, saying this day marks a new beginning. “Today, we honor you and wish you well, wherever your journey may take you,” said President Wilson. “We know what you have accomplished here and what you are capable of accomplishing as you move forward with your lives.”

The 2009 Student Senate Professor of the Year Sarah Riehl offered her own congratulations to graduates. “The class of 2009 is filled with stories of success, and to them we say bravo,” said Riehl, a visiting assistant professor of business administration at Illinois Wesleyan. “We want to thank you for sharing your talents.”

Graduates of today face more than the prospect of finding jobs. They are also the turning point in our society, said Howard R. Fricke, this year’s Commencement speaker.

“Sometime during the last 50 or 60 years, our values as a society changed. We came to revere money and power as goals to which people should aspire,” said Fricke, a 1960 Illinois Wesleyan graduate. “We publish lists of who the richest people are – not what they’re contributing to society, but how much money they have.” He believes this admiration of wealth over contribution is what has spurred a lack of ethics in business. “That is what produces the Enrons and Bernie Madhoffs of the world,” he said.

During his comments, Fricke urged graduates to see that success should be measured in more than means. “How many jobs you’ve helped to create, how many lives you’ve helped to enrich and how much you’ve given back are much more important than how much wealth you have accumulated,” he said.

Fricke understands the world of big business. The retired CEO of Security Benefit Group of Companies, he is credited with an innovative leadership that helped the company's assets grow from \$2 billion to more than \$36 billion.

In 2008, he was inducted into the Kansas Business Hall of Fame by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius. Called upon to lend his business expertise to state governments, Fricke said he has seen a spirit of gain over substance permeate politics. "Greed and the lust for power have not only infected the business world, but have also extended to the not-for-profit and government worlds," said Fricke, who served as Secretary of the Kansas Department of Administration from 2003 to 2005 and Secretary of Commerce in Kansas from 2005 to 2007, as well as in Illinois in the late 1970s. "From my experience, I believe historians will look back on this economic crisis and say it's the greed involved - the greed and our lack of trust in government officials to act on our behalf," he said.

Looking at the class of 2009, Fricke admitted he had hope for the future. "Somehow we have to return a place where what you are giving back to society is valued more than what you are taking from it," he said. "And I think you, this graduating class, are just the right people to start making that happen. You can fundamentally change our society." He urged each student to rely on their 'internal voice' to guide them. "Your external voice tells you what you should do to be admired by the world," he said. "Your internal voice should tell you what you should do to be proud of yourself." He prompted the class to "listen to your internal voice. Cherish those values Illinois Wesleyan helped you clarify."

President Wilson conferred upon Fricke an honorary doctor of laws degree during the Commencement ceremony. Also recognized was Professor of Chemistry Ram Mohan, who celebrated the formal investiture of an endowed professorship title to which he had been appointed earlier in the academic year. "Dr. Mohan is transforming the work of chemists around the globe," said Provost Beth Cunningham. "He is sought after as a speaker and collaborator at universities and conferences worldwide." President Wilson conferred Mohan with the Earl H. and Marian A. Beling Professorship in the Natural Sciences at Illinois Wesleyan.