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USF St. Pete Graduation Ceremony

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Dear Graduates, Family and Friends,

It seems very appropriate to me that in the midst of this festive holiday season, we are gathered together to celebrate the most momentous occasion in the life of a student. Your graduation from this University is the end result of years of hard work, long hours and self-sacrifice, and each of us here can truly appreciate the dedication that it took for you to complete your education. Our faculty and staff, many of whom have known you throughout your academic career, join me in saluting your achievements and wish you all the best as you leave us, with your degree in hand, to begin a new course of contributing your talents to the world outside our halls. Your success has filled us with joy, and we heartily congratulate each and every one of you.

Although I have been your dean for just a short time, I am well aware of the academic prowess and abundance of skills that you as a group have displayed at our campus. I have been impressed with your achievement in the classroom and I have been pleased with your willingness to plan and participate in the myriad activities that keep our campus so vibrant.

One of the graduates in this group has helped to bring a very special distinction to the St. Petersburg campus, an award which will be presented at the Tampa campus commencement ceremony. This woman, a student in our College of Business, has accomplished something that many find remarkable. She has been selected as a winner of the University's prestigious King-O'Neal Award, which is given to those students who achieve a perfect 4.0 average throughout their four-year college career. It is an
extreme pleasure to announce to you St. Petersburg's King-O'Neal Scholar, Elizabeth Dwyer. Ms. Dwyer, if you are with us tonight, please stand and be recognized.

Recognition is also due to a large group of people here tonight who might be described as the "unsung heroes" of this glorious occasion. I refer to the people who have given our students daily support and encouragement throughout their university careers. You, the family and friends of these graduates, have sacrificed alongside them and provided the emotional sustenance that has seen them through. Parents, grandparents, spouses, children, brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, friends—please stand so that we may salute you!

It is my fervent hope that each of you graduates will take with you something more than academic credentials and a USF degree. The small size of our campus has given us the opportunity to know you as individuals and to recognize the unique characteristics and talents that you have to take into the broader community. I hope that each of you will continue to develop those very important non-academic qualities—the capacity for caring, the concern for our society, the passion to create positive changes in our world—that we know is inherent in you.

I am reminded of two simple lines from The Prophet written by Kahlil Gibran, the great Middle Eastern writer, poet, philosopher:

"...You give but little when you give of your possessions—
It is only when you give of yourself that you truly give..."

Surely, the sharing of your resources and your possessions is important. But the giving of yourself—your love and understanding, your compassion and sense of rightness, your
concern and caring, your reliability and just "being there"—show a magnitude of strength which achieves that Higher Order. These human interactions are truly invaluable, not something that is quantifiable into evaluative entities.

You have all been an invaluable and integral part of our University family, and as alumni we hope to continue seeing and working with you. Your future successes are as important to us as the achievements we have seen you accomplish here. Please remember that graduation need not be the end of our relationship—you will always be part of the family at your alma mater, USF St. Petersburg.