

REMARKS – Muskegon Covenant Academy

COMMENCEMENT

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I would like to begin by congratulating the graduates of Muskegon Covenant Academy. It is your hard work that has brought you to the finish line of your studies here, and to the starting line of the rest of your lives. I know this is a big day and I know you will enjoy and remember it. I also want to congratulate family members, relatives, friends and mentors of the graduates. Your support of these students is essential to what they have achieved. So, it is your moment, too, to enjoy and remember.

I know the path to graduation has not been an easy one. And I especially want to also congratulate you on your decision to finish your high school education. Yes, that was a decision that each of you made and, I believe, it would have been much easier for each of you to do nothing at all, but yet you stepped forward and decided to finish and earn your High School Diploma. I think it is fantastic and I'd like to spend just a few minutes and connect your decision... to not give up... to a story in my own life.

I'm not sure what your impressions are of me as the guest speaker here today. Some, I suspect, are thinking what could an old white guy know about me? Well, in some ways you are right, but in a very important way you are wrong. My father was a mechanic without a high school diploma and while I never thought of us as not having much, and the fact was, we really didn't have much. When everyone around you doesn't have much, our lives seemed fine although there was a lot we just didn't have.+ I wasn't a great student, mainly, I think, because I didn't try very hard, but I got through. But let's fast forward 8 years and I just got out of a 4-year enlistment in the United States Army, I was newly married and couldn't find a job I wanted. I looked in the newspaper every day (Yes, newspaper. No Internet yet), tracked down every lead I heard about, but it was 1970 and the United States was in a deep recession and I just couldn't find a good job. In the newspaper there was section near the "Help Wanted" ads called "Business Opportunities". I looked at several things and saw an ad for a Franchised business opportunity to be a distributor for a brand of tools called "Snap-On Tools". I called the number and it led to me being the Muskegon distributor for Snap-On Tools. The person who had the business before me had failed. I didn't know it, but a huge

employer, Lakey Foundry, had just closed and times were bad in Muskegon. But I didn't know it, and I got up every day, and made cold calls on mechanics in garages, car dealerships and small shops all over Muskegon. It wasn't easy and I got lots of no's. But I didn't give up and kept at it. There were days when I woke up and didn't want to get in my truck and do it any longer, but I sucked it up and went out and kept making sales calls. And you know what? The more I called on people, eventually they trusted me and began to buy things. It was hard, but I learned about hard work and never giving up. I did this for almost 7 years, until I was one of the top dealers in the United States. I also saved every penny I could. My wife worked too, and we were very careful with our money, putting some in savings every week.

After about 6 years of selling tools, I knew I didn't want to do this for the rest of my life and began looking for another business to buy. Because I had been careful with money, built a small business with significant assets, plus a successful record as a business owner, I had enough to look for other opportunities. It took some time, but eventually I bought Muskegon Brake and in January 1977 I took over. The company had 10 employees and not only had I never had any employees; I never had done a brake job in my life. But I dove in and learned everything I could.

I worked 6 days a week, from early in the morning until 6 or 7 every night and I didn't give up, even though there were some tough times. Bad things happened, but I didn't give up. Key employees quit and I did their jobs, to learn exactly what they did and then I hired replacements, but I then knew exactly what it took to do their job. I never gave up. And so, the years passed, and the business grew as I looked for new opportunities, took some risks, and outworked my competitors. About 20 years after buying Muskegon Brake, from the original 10 people, I now had about 100 employees and decided it was time for something new. So, I found a buyer for my company and was able to retire at age 53.

Now, I've told you this story so you can understand that the impossible is possible. You've already shown that you know this because you are here today and receiving your diplomas. But now you will move on to whatever is next. I would like to leave you with just a few words of advice.

(1) Open a savings account and get in the habit of saving some money. Opportunities will come along, but you'll need some money to take advantage of them. Save what you can, but don't spend it because you are tempted. Save it and forget about it. Wait for that big opportunity....it could be education, a car, a

house or even a business, but wait for the right time. And you'll know when the time is right.

(2) Work hard. No matter what you do, give it everything you have. Prove to your boss that you are the best. Work extra hours if offered, take any training that is offered and let your company know that you are there for them.

(3) And finally, never give up. Never, ever give up. Keep trying and eventually you will succeed. You've already proved a lot. How far can you go?

And that's all I have to say. Thank you for listening and I wish you all much success in your lives. God Bless You All.