



CEO Michael Ames Welcomes Grads

A year ago, I came to my first recognition day, sitting somewhere over there. Then, as a candidate to take the job running Perkins, I sat, I listened and I watched. I watched as Perkins students and families cheered on their classmates as they were recognized for their accomplishments. I listened as staff and students spoke about Perkins, and as they honored the achievement of students, community members and Perkins staff.

As I sat, watched and listened. I was struck by the energy of the staff and students, by their compassion and by their support for each other. I knew that those students and staff were pretty special and that Perkins was a unique and special place.

Today, I am truly honored to be standing in front of you, now as CEO of Perkins, welcoming you to Recognition Day.

My initial impressions- of those gathered while sitting, listening and watching at last year's recognition day - could not have been more accurate.

Now, though, after more than nine months of working with the Perkins staff, talking with students and continuing to watch and listen, I have a much deeper understanding of how Perkins is truly a remarkable place. A place where students and participants in all of our programs can come to thrive or, as our tag line states, to blossom.

So, this morning, in this the 120th anniversary year of Perkins, I want to take a few minutes to reflect on what makes Perkins so special and to recognize the important role that our staff plays. Before doing so, I want to first thank you all for being here today, for being part of our Perkins community and for your support to Perkins and to our students.

So what makes the Perkins School so special? It is a number of things. It is our staff and teachers, it is this campus and the amazing facilities that include our pool, riding arena, residences and school buildings; it is also our volunteers and supporters, inclusive of the Board of Trustees and community members; and finally it is also our rich history - for 120 years Perkins has been caring for, supporting and educating individuals across a wide spectrum of care and educational needs.

It is our teachers and staff who, as a team, are talented, dedicated, and compassionate.

Take a walk through our campus, the school or residences at any hour on any given day, and you would be hard pressed not to smile and to appreciate what you see - staff engaging one on one with students, providing support, teaching, or helping a student work through a challenging situation. You might also find students singing and playing music as part of the annual Arts in Bloom or Poetry Jam celebrations or you may find students participating on one of our athletic teams.

At the heart of every activity, lesson and interaction is the objective of helping our students to grow, to learn, build confidence and be successful. The success of our staff in helping students succeed was reinforced in conversations I recently had with each of our seniors - while some did speak of not always loving Perkins or of having differences of opinions with some staff, most also spoke of how they built confidence, made friends and achieved academic success with the help of their teachers, clinicians, and other staff.

As one student said to me, when he first came to Perkins, he didn't trust anyone and would not accept help. He has learned, he told me, to trust the staff, to lean on them when he needs help and that it can be nice to have a team of people behind you, supporting and cheering for you.

The importance of our staff and the difference they can make was also underscored in a letter I recently received from a family. The letter, addressed to their child's program staff, included the following:

It is very hard to convey all the feelings of appreciation, respect and quite honestly, amazement, we have for you. ...you have profoundly changed our lives.... Let's just start with the clean, organized and welcoming environment the home exudes... let's just say it's impressive. the team walks around demanding and giving respect. Staff set an example of what young adult and adult behavior looks like.... You have engaged, you have built trust and you have shown that there is a way....

To get results like this, as I noted earlier, takes talent, dedication and compassionate individuals. However, it also takes a team, a team that works in concert, and that is what we have.

So, before turning our attention to our students and to those individuals that we are recognizing today, I want to say thank you to the incredible team we have - that team not only includes our teachers, clinicians and all the staff that work in our residences and classrooms but it also includes our kitchen staff who keep us well fed and who get to know the students and who work with many of them; as well as the housekeeping staff, maintenance staff, and administrative staff, all of whom also get to know the students and provide support in many different ways.

Now to our students, you are talented and resilient. I know that each of you have worked hard and overcome challenges; many of you shared with me how you came to Perkins after difficulties at your previous school. Some of you, I believe, weren't sure if you would get to this day. Through your perseverance, your willingness to work hard and accept support and help, you are here today and should be proud of all you have accomplished. As you have learned, we have also learned and grown

from our work with you. Thank you for being yourselves and for what you have each brought to our school.

In Cindy Wing's yearbook letter to the seniors, she wrote, "Although we say goodbye for now, we will continue to celebrate your achievements. Explore all of the talents you possess and never stop short of achieving success in whatever you do. Always remember where we are and know we enjoy hearing about the next stages of your life. Whatever you do, stay positive on the promise of a brighter tomorrow."

I want to echo Cindy's sentiments. All of Perkins is proud of you. In closing, I want to share a few words, words from the late Muhammad Ali, "Impossible is just a big word thrown around by small men who find it easier to live in the world they've been given than to explore the power they have to change it. Impossible is not a fact. It's an opinion. Impossible is not a declaration. It's a dare. Impossible is potential. Impossible is temporary. Impossible is nothing."

As you move forward in life, I hope that you will remember some of what you have learned here. Remember that with hard work and with support you can turn the impossible into the possible. I wish you all good luck and continued success.