

Speaker encourages Alfred University graduates to move outside their comfort zone

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Don McPherson speaks at Alfred University's Commencement Saturday morning.

ALFRED, NY Don McPherson urged the 2018 graduating class at Alfred University Saturday morning to move outside of what makes them comfortable in order to affect positive change in the world.

"To make a difference, you need to be outside of your comfort zone," McPherson said during his keynote address at Alfred University's 182nd Commencement Saturday morning in the Galanis Family Arena. "Anything is possible if you are compelled to do it."

McPherson was speaking from experience. An Alfred University alumnus who earned master's and Ph.D. degrees in glass science in 1984 and 1988, respectively, he is co-founder and chief science officer at EnChroma Labs, a Bay Area company that manufactures lenses that can effectively treat the most common form of color blindness.

Nearly two decades ago, McPherson had developed special eyeglasses used by ophthalmic surgeons to protect their eyes during laser surgery and he himself enjoyed wearing them because they made colors look more vivid. In 2001, he lent a pair of the glasses to a friend suffering from color blindness, and the friend remarked that when he put them on, he could see colors. The revelation led a curious McPherson out of his own comfort zone, and over the ensuing years, he collected data and conducted research, ultimately co-founding EnChroma in 2010.

More than 300 million people worldwide suffer from color blindness; the EnChroma glasses developed by McPherson allow 80 percent of color blind people who wear them to see in full color. The company has sold tens of thousands of EnChroma eyeglasses and is on the verge of developing a contact lens.

McPherson encouraged graduates to "step up," using what they've learned in their studies to make a difference. Paraphrasing political activist Ralph Nader's recent speech in California, McPherson said, "We all expect to see a few

people step up in the name of something bigger: to take on Goliath; defend the defenseless, work for little pay; be selfless.”

He closed by remarking, “Being able to speak to you about my Alfred experiences and to hopefully inspire you, the best and the brightest, to go out and do something amazing in the world has been one of the honors of my life.”

McPherson and Michele Cohen, a member of the University’s Board of Trustees, were awarded honorary degrees: McPherson the Doctor of Science, honoris causa, and Cohen the Doctor of Arts, honoris causa. Cohen, who has served as a trustee since 2001 and as chair of the Board’s Student Affairs Committee since 2005, was honored for her passion for the arts at Alfred University and her commitment to improving the lives of Alfred University students.

Cohen and her husband, Marty, have been creative and generous supporters of the arts at Alfred, creating the Cohen Art Center for the first-year Foundations program and the Cohen Gallery to spotlight alumni artists; sponsoring several senior shows in New York City for our students, and most recently, establishing the endowed deanship for the School of Art and Design.

She reminded graduates of the importance of taking chances and making the most of opportunities.

“You all took a chance when you came to Alfred. Many more opportunities will come your way,” said Cohen, whose son, Adam, graduated from Alfred University in 2003 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. “I am so proud to be part of a Board (of Trustees) that has given so generously, and I’m so proud to be part of the Alfred University community.”

Addressing their classmates were 2018 Marlin Miller Outstanding Senior Award recipients Logan Gee, an English and communication studies major from Nunda, NY, and Beryl Torthe, a psychology major from Pretoria, South Africa. The awards are given in honor of Marlin Miller, a longtime member of the Alfred University Board of Trustees and a generous supporter of the University.

Gee is a member of the Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Tau Delta honor societies, as well as the Alfred University Honors Program. She served two years as editor-in-chief of the Fiat Lux student newspaper, and won the Gifford Hopkins Writing Prize in 2017.

“Our contributions to the University have left an impact on this place. We’ve given of ourselves and made it our own,” Gee said. “I want each of you to continue working hard to give meaning to what you do. I am so proud to be an Alfred University graduate. Keep learning and keep growing, knowing this place will always be a home for you.”

Torthe graduated with designation as an Alfred University Scholar. She is a member of several academic honor societies, including Phi Beta Kappa and Chi Alpha Sigma. An accomplished writer, she won the Gertz Award for Excellence in Academic Writing in 2015.

“You’ve had a door held open for you every day,” Torthe told her fellow graduates. “The question is, how do we bring the magic that is Alfred out into the world? The answer is simple: we just do it. We take our kindness and go forth into the world. We go forth and do good.”

Recognized as the top students for the Class of 2108 were:

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences: Torthe, who earned a 3.98 grade-point average on a 4.0 scale. She is the daughter of Catherine Bourely and the late Jean-Yves Torthe.

School of Art and Design: Reed McLean, who earned a 3.98 grade-point average. The son of Don McLean and Suzanne Best of Norway, ME, he is a graduate of Oxford Hills High School in Norway, ME.

Kazuo Inamori School of Engineering: Taylor Kelley, a mechanical engineering major with a 3.98 grade-point

average. She is a graduate of Andover Central High School and is a daughter of Fred and Heather Kelley of Wellsville, NY.

College of Professional Studies: Amber Cramp, an accounting major with a GPA of 3.90. She is the daughter of Ian and Lori Cramp of Hornell, NY, and is a graduate of Hornell High School.

Alfred University Saturday conferred degrees on students who completed their course work in August and December 2017, as well as this semester. The University awarded six doctoral degrees, 66 master&s degrees and 351 baccalaureate degrees Saturday. A separate ceremony will be held June 2 in Brooklyn, NY, for the 129 students who completed their master&s degree programs in the University&s New York City program.

(In photo above, Don McPherson speaks at Alfred University&s Commencement Saturday morning. Members of the stage party wear eyeglasses manufactured by McPerson's company, EnChroma, that treat color blindness.)