

Winter storm doesn't halt Alfred University commencement

12/14/03

Dr. John P. Howe III, Alfred University's winter commencement speaker, barely made it to Alfred in time to deliver his speech, and the University made plans to house and feed parents and friends of graduates who might be stranded by the storm, but AU's commencement was held Sunday afternoon as planned. In his concluding remarks, President Charles M. Edmondson announced that a severe winter storm warning had been issued for Allegany County, and that the University was prepared to provide "cots, blankets and food" to those who might be stranded in Alfred and unable to find accommodations elsewhere. "You wouldn't hear this kind of announcement at the University of Miami," Edmondson joked. "Just consider it one more thing unique about Alfred University." While outside a steady snow fell, inside the McLane Center Howe encouraged graduates to "find a way to use your Alfred University experience to make a huge difference in this world we live in," as the University's mission, which stresses both community service and global understanding, requires. Howe, who is president and chief executive officer of Project Hope, an international foundation based in Washington, DC, that provide health care and education in 30 countries on five continents, said Project Hope arose from a conviction that matters, such as improved understanding among people around the world, were "too important to be left to public leaders." "They realized that we are very interdependent, not independent," and that health problems - from AIDS to SARS - cannot be defended against by nuclear submarines or missiles, said Howe. In January 2003, Howe recounted, he traveled to China to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Project Hope's presence in that country, where its volunteers helped to found a pediatric hospital where last year alone, more than 1,600 children had surgery. In 1996, when Project Hope was invited to work in the Dominican Republic, fewer than 20 percent of the children under 3 were vaccinated. Today, nearly 100 percent of the children under 3 are vaccinated, he said. Next month, Project Hope will announce its plans to help the children of Iraq, Howe said. In the US, 26 percent of the population is children 14 and under, but in Iraq, 49 percent of the population is under 14, yet there are no pediatric orthopedic surgeons, no pediatric cardiologists, and no pediatric neurosurgeons. "Healthcare can bring the people of the world closer together," said Howe, and providing that healthcare can be "richly rewarding" to the volunteers. "Try to find a way to make a difference in people's lives," he urged the AU graduates. Alfred University presented Howe with the J. Henry Smith Distinguished Public Service Award.