CART Provided by A La CARTe Connection

This rough edit transcript, which may contain missing, misspelled or paraphrased words, is only provided for your immediate review and is not certified as verbatim and is not to be cited in any way.

[ captioner standing by ]

[ soft music playing ]

Welcome to Stetson law graduation!

[Music]

>> Good afternoon! Please be seated. This is a historic moment; graduation is very special to us and even more special because our 2020 graduating class has weathered so much and has given us so much this year. I am Michelle Alexandra, a member of the faculty and Dean of Stetson University college of law. Welcome! Honored guests, students, faculty, family members, spouses, partners and friends, and most importantly, graduates welcome to the December 2020 graduate ceremony. Let's hear it for our graduates.

[Applause]

Today is a unique celebration as we recognize the classes of December 2019, May and August 2020 and December 2020. We are delighted that you could all be with us today in person for this celebration. First, I would like to acknowledge our active duty military personnel and veterans in this graduating class in our faculty and in our audience, please stand so that we can recognize your service.

[Applause]

>> Let me take a moment to introduce those on stage with me and those who are part of the procession. We are honored to have with us, Dr. Christopher Roellke, President of the sets University. Dr. Penter Executive Vice President and Provost of Stetson University. Jason Bent Associate Dean for academic affairs and professor of law Darryl Wilson, Associate Dean for faculty and strategic initiatives and professor of law, Abine, professor of law, Dr. Hudson, Assistant Dean for student affairs and our commencement speaker, Lori Baggett managing shareholder of Carlton Fields and recognize those honored guests that could not be part of this in‑person ceremony. They graciously send a video to the graduates and we invite you to view their personal videos on the graduation web page. They are Maureen Breakiron‑Evans, chair of the Board of Trustees, Greg Coleman, chair of the Board of overseers, Kevin Iurato, President of the sets lawyer’s alumni association and Rachel Wise the outstanding bar association President. As many of you know sets law has a pro bono requirement for graduation, our December 2019 and May 2020 graduates and students volunteered more than 34,000 hours of community service.

[Applause]

Many of our graduates took it to the next level bighting serve their communities and society even after they had far exceeded the required number of hours using the skills and tools learned at Stetson. The double down on that commitment during the pandemic creating new ways to be of use to the community. You will recognize those graduates by their blue cord representing our blues award for honorary pro bono service.

[Applause]

It is my hope that you will continue to serve your communities with distinction and professionalism as a Stetson lawyer. This year at orientation I told a group of fresh face 1L's that they would be forging a new path that no one had walked before. I impressed upon them that having empathy for others, grit and resilience are the pivotal foundation of a good attorney. As I thought about what I wanted to say to you all today, I found myself reflecting on those words, because I realized that you are the embodiment of them. You have already forged a path to conditions that no one had encountered before. As a result, you now know what it is like to successfully complete one of your last biggest challenges despite the immense hurdles that were placed on your path. You have done it!

[Applause]

This year, this mow meant Tuesday year you have shown that resilience that Stetson Law grit and a special breed of commitment. You have dug deep and transcended limitations to reach this amazing milestone. I am so proud of you as humans, as scholars and as legal minds. In answering the call to become an attorney, you are beginning your purpose in life. You now have the tools to be change agents and just warriors who can transform the world. So today we celebrate you, your graduation and your accomplishments. We take this moment to cherish all that you've done, and we feel hope and excitement for all that you will do. I now invite President Roellke to the podium.

[Applause]

>> Good afternoon. No, not quite. Good morning. Before I begin how about 3 shout outs. First for all the faculty, staff and administration and all those that made today's event possible. They've worked very, very hard.

[Applause]

A shout out to all the family, loved ones, friends et cetera that are in attendance today or not in attendance that have made the Law School education possible for our students over here.

[Applause]

And of course a huge shout out for our Law School graduates.

[Applause]

We gather today to celebrate the accomplishes of our students who have rightful lenders their jury Russ doctrine and other advanced law degrees. You have made it to the end of a remarkable journey literally unlike any other journey before you. As you join the Stetson alumni network and become a part of an enduring community contemplate where you were at this time last year. You are facing your last year of Law School and just a little bit more than a year as I was named by our Board of Trustees as Stetson's tenth President. I imagine we both looked forward to the year ahead with a lot of excitement and anticipation. Thomas Gray was right in 1742 when he wrote, ignorance is bliss because there was no way we could perceive what might lie ahead. And yet here you are. You made it. You made it through lock‑downs, online learning, virtual meetings, bad audio, lost internet connections, canceled bar exams, masks, hand washing, physical distancing, you name T you endured. Your friends, families and faculty are assembled here to celebrate you and I believe this is a very special graduation because you achieved your degree, and you did so this year. You're not only tested in the classroom but ultimately by life. For me and maybe for many of you, it would have been impossible to endure and even thrive this past year without one thing. Kindness! Since I first stepped into Stetson's campus I have quoted the wisdom of Mr. Rogers who said there are 3 ways to ultimate success. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. And the third is to be kind. So when Dean Alexandra and the administration and I first started the work and planning for resuming of classes in Gulfport and Deland that everything we did would be done with kindness, with empathy and with agency. So today as I congratulate you for becoming part of the rich tradition of Stetson Law graduates who have gathered at this very same spot I ask you to consider both the small and large acts of kindness you may have received along this journey. As you take the countless hours you have given in classrooms, courtrooms, clinical experiences and competitions out into the world and into your careers, I ask you to consider repaying the kindness you have received with the kindness you may give. Why? Kindness not only matters, it enables us to listen, to engage with others unlike ourselves and to consider paths we can forge together to make our community in fact the world a better place. The mission of Stetson University college of law is to be a dynamic and supportive scholarly community whose faculty and students will have a meaningful and far reaching impact on the law, the profession and society. Here at Stetson you have learned the law and the skills required to apply it to legal practice with integrity and with professionalism. I ask you today to please add kindness to your practice. As you grow and thrive I challenge you to help those around you to thrive, to offer small acts of kindness to your clients, to your partners, your institutions, your organizations, and those you love. Ultimately this is how you'll become the lawyer you set out to be, serving justice wherever life takes you. Thank you and congratulations.

[Applause]

>> President Roellke, on the recommendation of the faculty and students of the college of law and with the approval of the Board of Trustees of Stetson University I present Lori Baggett to receive the honorary degree of Doctor of Law.

[Applause]

>> Congratulations on this accomplishment. It's really quite amazing. Really wonderful. Lori Baggett you have distinguished yourself as a shining example of the heights that can be achieved when a lawyer combines hard work with dedication and outstanding personal and professional ethics. After graduating from Stetson University college of law with a juris doctor in 2002 you completed a federal clerkship for Charles Wilson U.S. Court of Appeals 11th circuit before joining the law firm Carlton Fields in Tampa. There you have excelled and built a name for yourself in construction law. You have successfully represented companies in labor and employment law issues with an expertise in workplace safety and health matters and are one of only a handful of Florida lawyers with OSHA 30 certification. Your exemplary work has led to a number of accolades including being named to the best lawyers in America for construction law, Florida trends, Florida legal elite and Florida super lawyer. Most recently you were named managing shareholder of the Tampa Office of Carlton Fields the third largest law firm in the Tampa Bay area with 96 local attorneys and more than 300 nationwide. You have held many leadership roles in the legal world in your firm and the community. You have served as chair of the American bar association's forum on construction law labor and employment division and completing a 3 year term on the governing committee. You cochair the women's alliance and are a past fellow of the leadership counsel oleyl diversity a national organization dedicated to building a more open and diverse legal profession. As the first person of color to hold your current position and one of a tiny percentage of your gender and ethnicity do not only become partner but to becoming managing partner in big law you are an inspiration to all of us. Your focus on promoting diversity in the legal profession represents the embodiment of consummate readiness and immense possibilities present in the current legal landscape for a Stetson Law graduate. In addition your professional responsibilities you continue to dedicate time and talent to the Stetson Law community by serving a second term as a member of the Stetson Law alumni association and being recently inducted into the U.S. Supreme Court with other Stetson alumni. You generously establish the Baggett family scholarship at Stetson Law for African American students who exhibit academic and personal leadership, paving the way for the meaningful inclusion of diverse perspectives in higher education and the legal profession at large. In light of your many, many achievements and under the authority invested in me by Stetson University's Board of Trustees I proudly present you with the honorary degree. Congratulations.

[Applause]

>> Thank you so much for those kind words. Thank you Dean Alexandra, to our distinguished guests, to our graduates and to all of you their family and friends. Still good morning. Good morning. And thank you for allowing me to say a few words on this special occasion which is certainly one of the best things to happen in 2020. My name is Lori Baggett, and it doesn't seem that long ago I too was sitting here in my commencement from Stetson college of law. I hope you all are savoring this accomplishment. Congratulations and well done. As the Dean said when you began your journey 3 years ago I'm sure you would never imagine it would culminate with surgical masks and social distancing and video conferencing but here we are in the middle of a global pandemic, a time of social change and tumultuous politics in a world so full of uncertainty. But in this moment I would like to offer some words of hope and optimism. First and foremost I hope you are well and if you or anyone you love suffered from COVID‑19 or any of the other challenges that this year has meated out you have my sympathy and my sincere hope and prayers that you're facing these challenges with the utmost grace and resilience possible. I also hope that you're looking forward to the new year and your new lives as attorneys with a sense of optimism and determination. Because you're entering in ancient profession at a time when wise lawyers and people who believe in the rule of law are needed more than ever. Remember for centuries when things fall apart and things seem hopeless it is often been lawyers who have answered the call to put things right side up again, to bring order and justice to daunting situations. The events showed us life holds surprises and challenges in the months and years ahead and Stetson has provided you with the foundation for your own success in meeting those challenges. Now how you define that success is going to be different for each one of you. It's a very personal decision. When I was in your shoes, I longed for someone wise just to tell me what I should do next. But fortunately for me my mentors did not hand me any easy answers and didn't direct me to some generic career template. Instead, they encouraged me to ask questions of myself, to be candid with myself about my ambitious for my career, about my desires for the kind of life I wanted and about how focused I was willing to be to attain those goals. I was fortunate to have the great honor to have a federal clerkship with Dr. Wilson on the 11th circuit and I joined the law firm I'm with today, Carlton Fields and in fact a year ago I was made managing shareholder there which is another great honor for me in 2020. Carlton Fields an old established firm tracing our roots back in Tampa more than a century and today with more than 300 attorneys. It's very much big law and while that's the path I chose for myself, not all of you will want to follow that path. Some supervisor you will work for law firms that are bigger than Carlton Fields, some smaller, some supervisor you may work for the government as prosecutor or public defender, others may go in corporation and some of you will decide not to practice law at all but to use your degree in some other way. Each of those paths can be the right one if it's the right one for you. You know my parents are career educators, they're retired now. But they both spent decades teaching and telling stories and trying to inspire students. So I spent a lot of time thinking about what I want to share with you today as we look forward to 2021 and beyond. After my father retired he took up a second year as an ordained minister which is what he does today. And when he delivers a sermon he likes to emphasize the message with an observation or parable. And he usually introduces that by saying now, let me tell you a story. So, like father, like daughter, let me tell you a story. In fact it's going to be 3 short stories, but I hope that you will find some meaning in them and something that you can take into the next phases of your lives and your careers. I want to talk about the importance of deliberate intent. And how that can focus your energy. I want to talk about action and how deeds must follow words in order for that deliberate intent to be authentic. And I want to talk about when intent leads to action, it often produces success. And it's important for to you share that success and how you achieved it with others. So that the next generation can benefit from that knowledge too. So let's begin with intent. When I was a little girl I grew up in the panhandle of Florida in Crestview. And as I said my parents were educators and they made sure I learned to love to read, that my curiosity was nurtured, and they did that very deliberately. One of the things my father did was gave me a book of poems and flagged one of his favorites and it was a copy of the poem called invictious. He knew that poem would inspire me just as it had inspired him and I'm sure you're familiar with it even if you don't recognize it by name. That's the poem that concludes, it matters not how straight the gate, how charged with punishments the scroll, I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul. And I like that poem so I printed it out and put it on the wall until my room and I must have looked at it every day. In fact it's still on the wall at my parent's house today and I like that poem because it's about challenges, about being faced with trauma and difficult situations. And the author describes them as the fell clutch of circumstances and bludgeonings of chance. I'm sure a lot of us feel like we've bludgeoned. But that's why intentionality is on important. There will always be things beyond your control and that you cannot change. When approach life with deliberate intent it means you look for those things that you can control, and you make the most of those opportunities. You understand that life is not something that just can or should just happen to you. You have agency over your life. Now asserting that agency is not easy, and I would never suggest to you that it is. But I believe you can do it. Times of human tragedy are often the times when we find our great of the inspiration and opportunity and you graduates are the ones with the vision and the determination that will lead us boldly down that path. Look, if you can get through 3 years at Stetson in these circumstances, you're capable of anything. And including defining your own success, creating your own happiness and making your mark in this world. So what does that look like? Let's talk about authentic action. You wouldn't be here today if you didn't already believe action must follow intent. You intended to become a lawyer then you took the steps and put in the work necessary to accomplish that intent. What I'm suggesting is that there are a lot of people who will talk a good game about their intentions but then they will neglect to supply the necessary action to deliver on that intent. For intent to be meaningful, substantive action must follow. Watching the events of this past summer unfold especially those related to racial justice movements it struck me that this is one of the reasons that people marching in the streets. There's a dominant platitude since the founding of our nation but hasn't received authentic action to truly mean what those words intend. A lot of people of all colors and creeds and backgrounds don't think so. So let me give you some context for my life as a black woman. After 3 years of hard academic work I was rewarded with some wonderful professional opportunities in Tampa and I was looking at several firms, all were very good, well respected firms and while all those firms said the right things and had the right policies regarding diversity and inclusion, one firm in my assessment had demonstrated its commitment to diverse sit and inclusion more convincingly than the others and that was my current firm. Why is that? Well the 1963, Carlton Fields hired Ed can you tell Cutler a Jewish man when it just wasn't done. That same year 1963, Carlton Fields hired Silvia a white woman who graduated number one in her Law School class at the University of Florida and they hired her at a time when all the other law firms only wanted to hire her as a secretary if at all. In 1972, Carlton Fields hired a black man, again at a time when hiring a person of color at a majority firm just wasn't done. And there were others I can go on about, but the point is when I was deciding where to start my career, I knew that Carlton Fields had demonstrated its commitment to diversity inclusion with action. Men and women having the opportunity to succeed regardless of their race, gender or their religion. Now I've been at Carlton Fields now for 17 years and I will be the first to tell you we do not have all the answers when it comes toss diversity and inclusion and we do not always get it right the first time. But I can tell you that our effort to get it right, to match our stated intention is authentic. So one of my messages to you on your journey is to make sure that you follow the intent you express in words with action that it authentic. And as you evaluate your opportunities, whether in your career or otherwise, verify that the opportunity is living up to its lofty stated goals. You know, the term cancel culture gets thrown around a lot these days, usually when it's aimed at the younger generation. I would submit, however, that holding people and organizations accountable for their stated intentions is a good thing. That's the kind of thing that leads to authentic action. So that brings us to my third point and that is share in your success. Make it a part of your life to give back to the community and to the next generation. Let me tell you one last story. As a young associate I was working hard billing hours, first year, turned into the second year and second year rolled into the third. And I started to feel a sense of emptiness that I couldn't shake. And I was complaining to a colleague one day and she suggested, you know, Lori perhaps if you get a little more involved in your community you'll find your place. My first reaction was, nah, I just want to travel and hang out with my friends, maybe a little retail therapy. That will make me feel better. Of course in the end my colleague was right. I had become so singularly focused on myself and my professional goals that I lost site of the bigger picture. I wasn't sharing in my success and giving back to my community. So I did two things that helped me find purpose in my life. First, I started to look for pro bono cases where my skill set could be used to help people and organizations that otherwise might not be able to afford legal representation. The American bar association talks about pro bono service this way. When society confers the privilege to practice law on an individual he or she accepts the responsibility to promote justice and to make justice equally accessible to all people. That's an awesome responsibility that we share as lawyers. I know Stetson helped ignite that fire in you. I heard what the Dean said about the hours you've put in already and I would encourage you not to lose sight of that responsibility. Make a personal commitment that you will give a certain amount of hours pro bono hours back to serving your community. And the second thing is I started volunteering with various community initiatives that had a mission that I believe in and that served the community. Those opportunities are so plentiful. Especially now with the challenges of this past year. Find your passion and contribute and pin your hat down so you don't lose it while you're giving remarks. The great Charles Hamilton once said to his law students at Howard University Law School, that a lawyer is either a social engineer or a parasite on society. Use your success to be a social engineer. Whatever the contribution, however big or small it's significant if it contributes in some way to a positive change in our society. Your success that we celebrate here today brings with it great responsibility and I encourage you to share that success and rise up to meet this moment. Help judge a debate for high school students or judge a Law School's moot court practice. Volunteer at a food bank. Start a scholarship that helps students less fortunate than you even if it's a small amount. It's not enough just to intend to do this. You must make it happen. These are things that have helped me find purpose and meaning in my life and I hope they will do the same for you. So in closing, my counsel to you graduates as you embark on your future, approach your careers and your life with deliberate intent, authenticate that intent by ensuring your actions live up to your aspirations. And share your success with others by giving back to the community no matter the challenges that come your way. Let's step forward into this new world confident in ourselves, the masters of our fate and the captains of our souls. Congratulations class of 2020. It has been my honor and privilege to speak to you today. Go forth and do good work!

[Applause]

>> Thank you attorney Baggett for these inspiring words. At Stetson we aim to provide you endless models of what you can be, and I hope this today gives you many, many more to look forward to and look up to. It is now time to celebrate our graduates. President Roellke today recognizes December 2019, May, August 2020 graduates for their Juris doctorate degree and joint degrees, we anticipate that all graduates listed in the graduation program will meet the requirements for their respected degrees. As such, I ask you that you prospectively confer their degrees on them, all graduates, please stand...

[Applause]

>> Thank you Lori Baggett and Dean Alexandra. By virtue of the authority invested in me by the Board of Trustees of Stetson University pursuant to the charter granted bit state of Florida, I pronounce you graduates of Stetson University and confer upon you all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto. Graduates please come forward as your name is called.

[Applause]

>> Good afternoon. We will now recognize our graduates individually. We begin with a fall 2019JD graduate Kelly O. Next we recognize our spring and summer 2020 JD graduates. The diploma will be presented by his aunt Katherine Clark a 1987 graduate of the college of law. Christopher Hennon.

[Applause]

Samantha W JD/MBA.

Courtney I.

The diploma for our next graduate will be presented by her mother, Robin Jackson 1987 graduates of the college of law and Father Douglas Jackson 1987 graduate of the college of law. Kelly Jackson, honors program.

Jonie J .

Joshua J .

Tyler J .

Nicoll K .

Rebecca K. Certificate of concentration and social justice advocacy. Julia N .

Katherine C. Certificate of concentration in advocacy.

The diploma for next graduate will be present bid her mother Lily L. 1985 graduate. Victoria L. Award for legal ethics.

 Amarode L.

The diploma for our next graduate will be presented by his father John L, 1988 graduates of the college of law. Sean L .

Anna L .

Morgan V. Certificate of concentration and N social justice advocacy and public interest award.

Colton M .

La Mark M. Certificate of concentration in social justice advocacy and Victor OWhaley award.

The diploma for our next graduate will be presented bid her cousin Evan a 2011 graduate of the college of law, Walter Mann award.

And the diploma for our next graduate will be presented by her cousin Evan Norton a 2011. Maria. JD/MBA.

Alejandre M. Victor OWhaley award.

Madison M .

Carrissa N .

Nicole N  excellence in real property award.

Anthony O  honors program, Florida constitutional law award.

Nikoluas P .

Emily P .

Kimberley Q .

Michael R  Victor OWhaley award.

The diploma for our next graduate will be presented by her father Charles S. 1989 graduate of the college of law and sister Grace S, a 2019 graduate of the college of law. Mary S  award.

Bryan S .

Lewis S .

Jonathan S, certificate of concentration in environment at law.

Congratulations graduates.

[Applause]

>> As educators the day these students walk into the building and the classrooms and the day they graduate, so we are over the moon right now. Graduates, Stetson is a community dedicated to excellence, our faculty service as teachers, mentors and role models, they demonstrate the values of leadership and service and they serve as an inspiration to all of us. Graduates, Stetson University college of law was founded in 1900. We know that you will follow more than a century of tradition as lawyers and leaders who are committed to the rule of law, who transforms society, who represent the values of your Law School, your University and our profession. Today we celebrate you and from today forward we are proud to call you graduates and alumni of the Stetson University college of law! Graduates, please stand one more time, turn your tassel from the right to the left of your tam as we acknowledge the class of 2020.

[Applause]

Woo‑woo.

>> And finally families, supporters and friends, you were there when our students needed you the most. Graduates let's thank everyone that helped you to become a graduate of Stetson University college of law. Congratulations.

[Applause]

After the recession is concluded we kindly ask you meet your party and exit safely and swiftly to the parking lot. We so appreciate your cooperation. Thank you all and be safe!

[Applause]

[Music]