Stetson Law School Graduation Ceremony - 8:30 a.m.

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[CAPTIONER ON STANDBY]

(PROCESSION)

(BAG PIPE MUSIC)

>>DEAN ALEXANDRE: Everyone. Please be seated.

Good morning. This is an historic moment. And I welcome you to soak it in and remember this for years to come. And you may know, but we will reiterate, that our graduates are our pride and joy. So we are particularly delighted to be doing this this morning.

I am Michelle Alexandre, a member of the faculty and Dean of Stetson University College of Law. Welcome. Honored guests, students, faculty, family members, partners, and friends and most importantly, graduates: Welcome to our December 2020 commencement ceremony. Let's hear it for our graduates!

(APPLAUSE)

>>DEAN ALEXANDRE: 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, our veterans in this graduating class, in our faculty, and in our audience. Please stand so that we can recognize your service.

(PAUSE)

(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 Stetson Law. Dr. Noel Painter, Executive Vice President and Provost of Stetson University. Jason Bent, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Professor of Law. Darrely C. Wilson, Associate Dean for Faculty and Strategic Initiatives and professor of law. Dorothea Bean, professor of law. And Dr. JoCynda Hudson, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs.

I would like to recognize those honored guests who, due to COVID restrictions, unfortunately could not be part of this ceremony. They graciously sent a video to the graduates. We invite you to view the videos on the graduation webpage. And you will hear from Maureen Breakiron Evans, Board of Trustees. Kevin Iurato, Alumni Association and Rachel Wise, the Outgoing Student Bar Association President.

As many of you know Stetson Law has a pro bono requirement for our graduation in 2019 and May 2020 graduates and students volunteered more than 43,000 hours of community service. Many of our graduates took a pro bono requirement to the next level by continuing to serve their communities and society even after they far exceeded the required number of hours using the skills and tools learned at Stetson. They doubled 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 cords, representing the blue's award for 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 our group of fresh-faced 1Ls they would be forging a new path that no one has walked before. I impressed upon them that having empathy for others and grit and resilience are the pivotal foundation of a good attorney. As I thought about what I wanted to say to all of you today, I found myself reflecting on those words. Because I realize that you are the embodiment of (INDISCERNIBLE). You have already forged a path to conditions that no one has encountered before. As a result, you now know what it is like to successfully complete one of your life's biggest challenges, despite the immense hurdles that were placed on that path. You have done it. This year you have shown that resilience, that Stetson Law grit and a special breed of (INDISCERNIBLE) commitment. You have dug deep and transcended endless limitations to reach this amazing milestone. I am so proud of you, of who you are as humans, scholars and legal minds.

In answering the call to become an attorney, you are beginning your purpose in life. You now have the tools to be changing justice warrior who can transform the world. So today we celebrate your graduation, your accomplishment. We take this moment to cherish all that you have done and we feel hope and excitement for all that you will do. I know invite President Roellke to offer (INDISCERNIBLE).

(APPLAUSE).

>>DR. CHRISTOPHER ROELLKE: Good morning. Before I begin I am going to ask for three shoutouts. How about a shoutout for all of the faculty, staff, and administration that made today's event possible?

(APPLAUSE)

How about a shout out for all of the family and loved ones that made this law education possible?

(APPLAUSE).

And of course, how about a huge shoutout for our graduates?

(APPLAUSE)

We gather today to celebrate the accomplishments of our students who have rightfully earned their juris doctor and other advanced law degrees. Congratulation to the Class of 2020.

(APPLAUSE)

You have made it to the end of a remarkable journey literally unlike any other before you. As you join the Stetson alumni network and become part of an enduring community of Stetson Law graduates, contemplate for a moment where you were at this time last year. You were facing your last year of law school and just a little more than a year ago I was named by our board of trustees as Stetson 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 we wrote: "Ignorance is bliss." Because there was no way we could perceive what lie ahead. And yet here you are. You made it. You made it through lockdown, online learning, virtual meeting, bad audio, lost internet connection, canceled bar exam, masks, hand washing, physical distancing. You endured. Your friends, families, and faculty are assembled here to celebrate you and I believe this is a special graduation because you achieved your degree and you did it in this year. You are 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 on to Stetson's campus I have quoted the wisdom of Mr. Fred Rogers, who said there are three ways to ultimate success: First is be kind. The second is be kind. And the third is be kind. So when Dean Alexandre and I and the administration started the plans, we made a conscious decision that everything we did, everything we planned would be done with kindness, with empathy, and with agency.

So today as I congratulate you for becoming the part of the rich tradition of Stetson Law graduates that have gathered in this very same spot, I ask you to consider the small and large acts of kindness that you have received during your time here. 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 re-paying 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. Admission of Stetson University College of Law is to be a dynamic and scholarly community, whose faculty and students have a meaningful and far-reaching impact on the law, the profession, and society. Here at Stetson you have learned the law and skills required to apply it to legal practice with integrity and with professionalism.

I also ask today as you move forward that you 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, your partners, your institutions, your organizations and those that you love. Ultimately this is how you will become the lawyer you set out to be serving justice wherever life may take you.

Thank you and congratulations.

(APPLAUSE)

I would like to welcome back to the podium, Dean Alexandre.

>>DEAN ALEXANDRE: It is now time to celebrate our graduates. President Roellke. Today we recognize the December 2019 and May August 2020 graduates for the juris doctor degree and the LMN degrees as well as the joint degrees. We anticipate that all graduates in the graduation program will meet the requirements for their perspective degrees. As such I ask that the perspectively degree their degrees on them.

All graduates please stand. Confer their degrees on them.

>>DR. CHRISTOPHER ROELLKE: Thank you, Dean Alexandre.

By virtue of the authority vested in me by the Board of Trustees of Stetson University, pursuant to charter granted by the State of Florida, I pronounce you "Graduates of Stetson University" and confer upon you all of the rights and privileges pertaining there to.

Graduates, please come forward as your name is called.

>>: We begin with the recognition of our spring and summer 2020 masters of law and advocacy graduate, Armando Perez.

Next we recognize our fall 2020 master of laws in advocacy candidate. James Watt Beck with (INDISCERNIBLE). (NAMES). In absentia. And Karla Reyes, in absentia. Next we recognize the Fall 2020 master of laws in elder law candidate. T. Lorraine John. (APPLAUSE). Lindsay Blessinger Charles. Next we recognize our spring and summer 2020 master of laws in international law graduate. Virginia Obando. Next we recognize our fall 2020 master of laws in international law candidate. Ernest Raya, in absentia. Jennifer (INDISCERNIBLE).

(APPLAUSE)

Rene, Katarina Coster, in absentia. Now we will recognize our Fall 2019 JD graduates.

(NAMES)

>>: We will now go into our Spring and Summer 2020 JD graduates. Elizabeth Laura Edgluni.

Omar Amin. Certificate of concentration in advocacy.

(NAMES)

The diploma for our next graduate is presented by his grandfather, a 1966 graduate of the College of Law and her father, a 1995 graduate of the College of Law. Madison Paige Cacciatore.

(APPLAUSE)

(NAMES)

Jeff Chang, certificate of concentration in advocacy and award.

The diploma for the next graduate is presented by his mother, a 1985 graduate of the College of Law.

(APPLAUSE)

>>: Andrew Joseph Conrad. (APPLAUSE).

Rebecca Gail Cook, certificate of concentration in social justice advocacy. (APPLAUSE).

Pedro Cuervo (APPLAUSE).

Evan Phillip Dada, National Order of Scribes Award (APPLAUSE).

Bridgett Misty Dennis, American Institution of Bankruptcy Institute award in Bankruptcy Studies.

(APPLAUSE)

Alexis Devo. JD MBA, Honor's Program, certificate of -- Leadership Award and Victor O'waly Award (APPLAUSE).

Alexandra Marie Dragovich. (APPLAUSE).

Ryan Glen Dwyer. Advocacy Award and Victor O'waly Award (APPLAUSE).

>>: Hannah Diaz, Honors Program.

(APPLAUSE)

Elysse Marie Ingall (APPLAUSE).

J Frazier Flasher (APPLAUSE).

Valerie Faith Gatlin (APPLAUSE).

The diploma for our next graduate is presented by her father, a 1981 graduate of the College of Law. Britney Nicole Given (APPLAUSE).

Dia Gordon (APPLAUSE).

James Green (APPLAUSE).

Phillip Anthony Hampton (APPLAUSE).

>>DEAN ALEXANDRE: Graduates, Stetson is a community dedicated to excellence. Our faculty serve 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 transform 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."

(APPLAUSE - CHEERING)

Graduates, please stand one more time.

(APPLAUSE)

Turn your tassel to from the right to the left of your (INDISCERNIBLE) as we acknowledge the Class of 2020!

(APPLAUSE - CHEERING).

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

(APPLAUSE)

After the recession has concluded, we kindly ask that you meet your party and exit safely and swiftly to the parking lot. We appreciate your cooperation. Have a great day everyone. Thank you and be safe.

(APPLAUSE).

(END)

[MUSIC]