

Des Moines Area Community College

Commencement Address

By

Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn

President, World Food Prize

At

Veteran's Auditorium

May 7, 2009

DMACC Commencement Speech

President Denson, thank you for the great honor of inviting me here tonight to address the graduation class.

Tonight as we celebrate your graduation, I want you to know that I think of DMACC every morning as I come to work. That may sound rather unusual to you since I never attended DMACC. But everyday, as I take the 7th street exit off the freeway to go downtown I go past that huge billboard with DMACC's name and the exhortation Dream It! Do It! And

seeing that billboard will often take me back to the dream I had in the early 1960's. John F. Kennedy was President then the leader of the free world and his call to service had caused me to hope that one day I might be able to be in the Foreign Service to represent our country while serving in embassies around the world. It was a real long shot because in those days it was graduates from Harvard, Princeton and Yale that got into diplomacy and not individuals like me from an obscure school in Dubuque that few people in Washington had ever heard of. But my teachers at Loras there implanted something inside me that allowed me to pass the written test and then the oral test and

then one day to fulfill my dream and be sworn in at the State Department in 1967 and eventually become Ambassador.

I have gotten to know some of your teachers here at DMACC: teachers like Dr. Lisa Oceans and John Liepa who are establishing the only program in the state that is promoting the preservation and the teaching of Iowa history. And, Dean James Stick and Chef Robert Anderson and the staff of the Iowa Culinary Institute. Each year, I bring all of our World Food Prize Laureates to DMACC for a formal dinner. They rave about the superb work done by the students in preparing such an elegant

meal. I believe these teachers and many others have likewise planted in you skills and knowledge that will permit you to follow your dreams, just as they have with past graduates.

As you leave here today, I want you to take with you something to inspire you the way John Kennedy's leadership of the world inspired me. So I want you to remember these three things so that they will always be a reminder that you come from a state and a community that despite its size and location has indeed led the world in at least three different ways; and that DMAACC and

its graduates are preserving and building on these same three legacies.

The first is always remember this building in which we are holding this ceremony. Until about 1980 Vets Auditorium was the site of the most well attended women's sporting event in all of history – the Iowa girl's high school six player basketball championship game. This is a historic edifice and a great treasure for our community. Each spring it was filled to the rafters everyone here to watch young women play sports. It was the toughest ticket of the year. Before Title IX, before the NBA

or NFL Championship games were being televised, people were watching Iowa high school girls play basketball on TV. Iowa was leading the world in providing opportunities for young women. DMACC is continuing that legacy in women's athletics and in many other areas by promoting opportunity for many groups of people. Of course, the DMACC Bears have had basketball and volleyball teams ranked in the top ten nationally. But beyond that, DMACC has the most culturally diverse student population in the entire state of Iowa with students from 55 countries. DMACC is giving them a chance to dream it and do it. This should be an enormous point of pride for all of you.

The second source of inspiration I want you to remember is just across the river. It is the brand new Robert Ray Asian Garden. It was built to commemorate then Iowa Governor Robert Ray's action on behalf of refugees from Indochina. In 1979 when no country, including the United States, was willing to accept the Vietnamese Boat People – who were drowning in large numbers after being pushed back out to sea, or were being killed by pirates – only one person and one state stepped forward. That person was Bob Ray. That state was Iowa. He wrote to President Carter saying that if only the president would reopen America's

door to accept these refugees, that Iowa would in fact double the number of refugees it had accepted. He was the first elected politician anywhere in the world who tried to rescue those unfortunate people. It worked. Again, Iowa led the world – this time in humanitarian outreach. When those Indochinese refugees came to the state, it was DMACC and other community colleges that offered them the opportunity to learn the skills that would be necessary for them to become integrated into our society.

Individuals like Vinh Nguyen who was one of those Boat People, and who could not speak English when he arrived. He took ESL classes at DMACC with Dr. Ewa Pratt , then earned

his A.A. degree in 1991. He then got a teaching degree and has served in the Des Moines public school system. Last year, he was nominated as an outstanding DMACC graduate. DMACC gave him a chance to have that dream, and he did it.

The third source of inspiration I want you to remember is a few blocks down along the river. It is the century old Des Moines public library building which will soon be the new home of the World Food Prize Foundation that I head. It will be known as the Norman E. Borlaug Hall of Laureates in honor of the founder of the World Food Prize and one of Iowa's and

America's and indeed the world's greatest heroes. Dr. Borlaug, who turned 95 this year, developed a miracle variety of wheat which could triple its yield and resist disease. He rescued India and Pakistan from mass starvation in the 1960's. He is credited with saving a billion lives and being the man who saved more lives than any other person who has ever lived. Dr. Borlaug has received the Nobel Peace Prize, the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest award our country can give to a civilian. In all the history of our country, only five people have ever received these three honors: Dr. Borlaug is one, the other four are: Nelson Mandela; Elie

Wiesel; Mother Teresa; and Dr. Martin Luther King. Dr.

Borlaug started out on a family farm in Howard County in northeast Iowa and went to the equivalent of a community college in Minneapolis before being accepted to study agriculture. He had a dream that the number of hungry people in the world could be reduced and he did it. He led the Green Revolution and the single greatest period of food production and hunger reduction in all human history. Once again, Iowa led the world.

DMACC has produced a graduate who has also played a very significant role in continuing that Green Revolution that Norman Borlaug started. His name is Dennis Albaugh. He started a company in the basement of his home in Ankeny, which he built into a \$33 million dollar a year producer of agricultural chemicals, and in particular a chemical which is the main ingredient in Roundup herbicide. It is the largest selling agro chemical in the world. It is glyphosate which allows the no till approach to agriculture to be used around the world, promoting soil conservation. This endeavor grew into a company with assets of \$1.5 billion and with sales in 48 states and 40

countries. Dennis Albaugh had a dream and he did it. He saw an opportunity where others saw only challenges. That agriculture business degree he obtained from DMACC took him a very long way.

So when you walk down the new Principal River Walk when it is finished, and you look at those three structures, I want you to remember those times when Iowa led the world, and recall the great opportunity that your school has given you.

I hope you will be inspired to follow your dream and do it.