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## **Spring Commencement Address, Phillip H. Power, April 27, 2003**

Eastern Michigan University

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## Commencement Address

Eastern Michigan University

April 27, 2003

President Kirkpatrick, members of the Board of Regents, faculty and staff at Eastern Michigan University: Thank you for awarding me an honorary degree. I am deeply honored.

Graduating students, family and friends: When I was asked to be your commencement speaker, I went online and found out a few things about such speeches.

Apparently, the longest commencement address ever delivered was at Harvard – where else? – in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. All told, it lasted six hours – three hours in Latin and three in Greek – and at the end students were given a pop quiz. I promise you, there will be no tests today!

The shortest speech I could find was given by Nels Smith, when he was Governor of Wyoming. Addressing the graduating class of the University of Wyoming, he leaned on the podium, gave them a sharp look and said: “You done good.” And he turned and sat down. Well, I’m pleased to say this to the 2003 graduating class of Eastern Michigan University: “You done good!”

**Much of this speech comes from a conversation I had last month in Welch Hall with 10 of your student leaders. What fine young people – sensible, articulate, thoughtful and on point.**

**Their major concern: How can we succeed – let alone survive – entering a world that is very different and much more scary than it was just a few short years ago?**

*entered a world where*  
**They're absolutely right. What previous graduating class ~~saw~~ terrorists crash airplanes into tall buildings? A world where anthrax powder spills out of an innocent envelope? Where somebody could commit a suicide bombing in a restaurant just down Michigan Avenue? On top of it all, our economy is isn't so hot just now; I suspect many of you are worrying about getting a good job once you graduate.**

**I propose to give you three pieces of advice based on my own experiences about how to survive and prosper as you leave Eastern.**

First, never, ever / stop learning.

Most of you have learned various specific skills during your time here that will help you in your jobs, whether they be teaching methods or the ability to understand a balance sheet. But even more, I hope you've thought about how to keep on learning as times change, technology advances and the realities of the past are replaced by the rewards of the future. Many of the good careers of 10 or 20 years from now haven't even been invented yet. To take advantage of them, you're going to have to develop and retain the ability to learn entirely new things as you go through your life.

Take my own career as an example. When I broke in as the sports editor of the newspaper in Fairbanks, Alaska, in 1962, I wrote my stories on a manual typewriter. I handed my copy to a guy who ran a typesetting machine called a Linotype. If he was really flying, he could set a 21-inch galley of type in about an hour. When I started my company in the mid-1960's, I even wrote my column on a Linotype machine. But by the time we moved into our new plant in Livonia in 1971, I was writing my column on an electric typewriter in a typeface that could be scanned optically to generate six-level paper tape that drove Linotype machines at about 50 inches of type in an hour.

By the late 1970's, I was writing my column on a keyboard that fed a computerized typesetting system that could set enough type to fill a newspaper page in an hour. By 1990, we had typesetting systems that could set an entire newspaper page in a couple of minutes. And today I write my column on a computer in my office just outside Ann Arbor and transmit it in a flash by email it to an editor in Howell. He emails it to the central computers of my various newspapers and it winds up in seconds on some 50 different editorial pages!

I never imagined any of these developments when I started out as a reporter nearly 50 years ago! But the technology kept changing, and I had to learn to change with it.

You've got some great information tools available to you today. Newspapers used to bring the news once a day, but television brings it quicker and in pictures. CNN had round the clock coverage of the war in Iraq. And now you have the Internet and cell phones and instant messaging. You can surf the Web to research *almost* ~~just about~~ anything, just as I did with commencement speeches. Never has it been possible to get as much news and information as quickly and easily as today.

Sounds great, doesn't it. But as grumpy old newspaperman, however, I'm a little skeptical. There's a big difference between real news and mere gabble.

A famous French diplomat served as ambassador to China and then to the US. When asked about the difference between these two countries, he replied: "In China, there are three TV channels, five radio stations and two newspapers – all run by the Communist Party. As a result, you know nothing. In America, there are 1856 daily newspapers, six major TV networks, hundreds of channels on cable TV and thousands of radio stations. As a result, you know nothing." And a famous British newspaper publisher, Lord Northcliffe, once called journalism "a profession whose business it is to explain what it personally does not understand."

Like the spam that is cluttering up the screen of your computer, there's no getting away from the torrent of rubbishy factoids delivered daily by today's media. Here's where a university education – developing a critical mind, learning the capacity to sift out the significant from the trivial and the real from the spin – is priceless. This is a gift you have received from Eastern. Keep it always with you; it will turn out to be the best survival tool you will ever have.

**Second piece of advice: Seize the day. Carpe diem.  
Take the initiative.**

**Years ago, I was appointed by Governor Blanchard to chair the Michigan Job Training Coordinating Council, the main group setting human investment policy in the state. For the first six months on the job, I found all I was doing was reacting to somebody else's agenda, whether it was the labor movement or Lansing politicians or the US Department of Labor. It wasn't until I got mad one day and told my staff, "Stop! We're not going to do anything until we sit down, shut the door, turn off the phones and figure out what we want to do! Once we know that, everybody else will have to react to us."**

**It worked. We figured out how to treat otherwise bureaucratic job training programs as a business – the human capital business. We got a lot done and helped a lot of people. And our work wound up being featured in the best selling book, Reinventing Government.**

**So when you find yourself overwhelmed by your job or by the demands of others, just sit down and figure out what you want to do and how you can go about it. You'll be surprised at how much you can accomplish.**

**Here's another example. While I was a student at the University of Michigan, way back in the late 1950's, I joined a group called Americans Committed To World Responsibility. We stayed up too late talking. We drank too much coffee and far too much beer. And, of course, we wrote a manifesto: Young people should have the opportunity to do volunteer work in less developed countries abroad. At the time, I was an editor at the Michigan Daily, the student newspaper. And so I ran our manifesto on the editorial page, where it drew an enthusiastic response. Eventually, the idea made it to a Senator from Massachusetts who was running for president, John F. Kennedy. It turned out to be the centerpiece of a famous speech he gave in Ann Arbor in late October, 1960. That speech led directly to the formation of the Peace Corps.**

**There is nothing as powerful as a good idea whose time has come, whether it's from scruffy undergraduates or businesswomen in suits with offices in the executive suite. So when you get a good idea or feel passionate about something, remember: **Seize the day!****



**My third piece of advice is simple: Give back to your community.**

**This comes straight from my conversation with your student leaders. Helena talked about VISION, with nine different volunteer programs and 900 student volunteers working on campus and in poor neighborhoods, while Emory explained how a mentor had helped him get into Eastern and how he hoped to mentor others once he graduated.**

**As you are preparing to leave college and go out into the world, much of your energy will be rightly directed to your struggle for success, whether you want to be a teacher or a musician or a librarian or a cop. But while you are struggling for success in your chosen career, please remember always to search for significance. At the end of the day, never forget that your success will turn to dust in your hand if you do not search for a way to give something back: to your family, your community, your university. They helped you to the peak of success you are experiencing today, and you have an obligation to help them assist those who are coming after you.**

**As long ago as the fifth century before Christ, the ancient Greeks had much the same idea. Every person, upon becoming a citizen of Athens, was required to recite an oath, which went as follows:**

**“We dedicate ourselves to the ideals and sacred ways of our free society. We will never bring disgrace upon our community by acts of dishonesty or cowardice; nor fail to respect our fellow citizens. We will revere and obey the laws under which we live. We will do our utmost to quicken understanding, respect and reverence for them. And we will strive unceasingly to strengthen the public sense of civic duty. Thus, in all these ways, we will seek to transmit this city to those who come after us, not only/not less, but far greater and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us.”**

**One final thought on this point. Eastern Michigan is a public university, one of 15 in the state of Michigan. Public universities, unlike private ones, have over the years cherished a fundamental obligation to admit to the life of the mind young people of all sorts – rich and poor, rural and urban, white students and those of color, American citizens and people from abroad. The whole point of public universities is that they welcome those who never would have got a chance to get a college degree, in other countries. Some of you who are graduating today are the first ever in the entire history of your family to have earned a university degree – what a fantastic achievement! – and what a defining accomplishment for this great public university!**

**While I was a Regent at that university at the other end of Washtenaw Avenue, it occurred to me that when the historians of the future get around to telling the story of America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they are likely to conclude that the signature creation of American society was to have created, supported and sustained great public universities. They have brought higher education to the widest range and largest group of people in human history, and through them our society has reaped the benefits of the most profitable investment of them all: investments in human capital, the skills and brains of our people.**

**That's it for my advice. Never stop learning. Seize the day. Give something back. If you do all these things, you will – in the words of Governor Smith – have “done good”.**

**You are about to start on a wonderfully exciting journey, Eagles ready to soar, freshly armed with a degree from Eastern Michigan. Congratulations to all of you ... and to your family, your friends, your community and your university, who all helped you to get to this wonderful place. God speed!**

*Commencement*

SECTION: 17

*April 2003*

DATE:

March 18, 2003

**BOARD OF REGENTS**  
**EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY**

**RECOMMENDATION**

**COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER AND HONORARY DEGREE RECIPIENT**

**ACTION REQUESTED**

An invitation has been extended to Philip H. Power, founder, owner and chairman of the board of HomeTown Communications Network, Inc., to be commencement speaker for the Sunday, April 27, 2003 commencement ceremonies, and he has accepted.

It is recommended that the Board of Regents approve the awarding of an Honorary Doctorate of Public Service to Mr. Power.

**STAFF SUMMARY**

Biographical information and Mr. Power's vita follow.

**FISCAL IMPLICATIONS**

None

**ADMINISTRATIVE RECOMMENDATION**

The proposed Board action has been reviewed and is recommended for Board approval.

\_\_\_\_\_  
University Executive Officer

*March 10, 2003*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Philip H. Power

Philip H. Power is founder, owner and chairman of the board of HomeTown Communications Network, Inc., a group of community newspapers throughout Michigan, around Cincinnati, Ohio and in the upper Midwest. His newspapers are widely recognized as among the very best of their kind in the country. Mr. Power received in 1993 the Leshner Award, the highest honor in the suburban newspaper industry. His award-winning column appears regularly in his Michigan newspapers.

His company also publishes various local "yellow pages" telephone directories, specialty publications and shopping guides. The company is engaged in linking community newspapers, telephone directories and the Internet into the HomeTown Communications Network. To execute its Internet strategy, HCN founded in 2000 a new corporation, HomeTown Digital, which launched in October 2001, HomeTownLife.com, an Internet portal which brings together newspaper news and classified advertising content, business listings from the telephone directories and a suite of Web-based marketing and advertising tools. In September 2000, the company launched The Livingston County Daily Press & Argus, the first new daily newspaper started in Michigan in 45 years and one of a handful of new dailies started in the country over the past decade.

An entrepreneur, Mr. Power founded his company in 1965. He wrote news stories, sold ads, corrected proofs, bundled papers and delivered them to the carriers, collected past due accounts, hired and fired staff. He started writing his column on a Model C Linotype machine and now writes on a personal computer, sending his column to his newspapers by Internet. Initially the company published six newspapers in Western Wayne County with a staff of 20-odd employees. Today, Hometown Communications Network publishes more than 70 community newspapers with an aggregate circulation of more than 650,000 and employs around 1,000 people.

Mr. Power was appointed a Regent of the University of Michigan in 1987 and was elected to office in 1990, winning more than one million votes statewide. As a Regent, he led the effort to rewrite U of M rules governing the transfer of technology from University laboratories into the commercial world. As a result, applications for patents, new company start-ups and IPO's by U of M faculty and staff have markedly increased. He was defeated in a bid for re-election in 1998. He received the Distinguished Alumni Service Award from the U of M Alumni Association in October 2000.

From 1983 to 1990, Mr. Power chaired the Michigan Job Training Coordinating Council. He was a member of Michigan Governor Blanchard's cabinet Council on Human Investment and Commission on Jobs and Economic Development and served as a primary advisor to the Governor on human investment and job training. Mr. Power is widely recognized for his innovative redirection of Michigan's job training programs as well as

for the development of an integrated human investment policy for his state. His work is featured in David Osborne's book, Reinventing Government. In 2000, Governor Engler appointed him to the Executive Committee of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation; he is now the Vice Chair of the MEDC and also chair of the Finance Subcommittee.

In 1991, Mr. Power helped found the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, a not-for-profit organization that helps communities, states, employers and others achieve world-class workforce development systems. He currently serves as its Chairman.

Mr. Power served on the Board of Directors of Jacobson Stores, Inc.; he is now a director of SenSyTech Technologies, Inc. He is vice chair of the Michigan chapter of The Nature Conservancy and president of the Power Foundation. He also is a member of the board of the University Musical Society, in Ann Arbor, MI.

Mr. Power graduated summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Michigan in 1960. While at the U of M, he was editorial director of the student newspaper, The Michigan Daily, and a member of Americans Committed To World Responsibility, the student organization that proposed volunteer service abroad – the original version of the idea taken up by John F. Kennedy as the Peace Corps. He received a Marshall Scholarship to study at Oxford University in England, where he received a MA in philosophy, politics and economics in 1964. He is married to Kathleen K. Power. They have two sons, Scott T. Sutton M.D., a resident in internal medicine in Denver, and Nathan E. Power.

## PHILIP H. POWER

### BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

1974-on Chairman of the Board, founder and owner, HomeTown Communications Network (formerly Suburban Communications Corporation) Livonia, Michigan. Subsidiaries include:  
Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc., Livonia, MI  
HomeTown Newspapers, Inc., Howell, MI  
The Community Press, Cincinnati, OH  
Camden Publications, Inc., Camden, MI  
Lansing Community Newspapers, Inc., Charlotte, MI  
HomeTown Directory Company, Pigeon, MI  
Specialty Communications, Royal Oak, MI  
Mirror Newspapers, Royal Oak, MI  
Hometown Digital.com, Livonia, MI

Founder and Chairman, Observer Newspapers, Inc.

Paul H. Todd, Jr., (D-Kalamazoo),  
Member of Congress Third District, Michigan  
Administrative Assistant, 1964-1966  
Campaign Manager, 1966

Sports Editor and acting city editor, Daily News-Miner, Fairbanks, Alaska

### PROFESSIONAL

Current Board of Directors:  
SenSyTech, Inc., Newington, VA  
President, Power Foundation, Ann Arbor, MI  
Chair, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, Ann Arbor, MI  
Vice Chair, The Nature Conservancy Michigan Chapter Board of Trustees  
University Musical Society, Ann Arbor, MI

2000 Distinguished Alumni Service Award,  
The Alumni Association of the University of Michigan





Candidate for Democratic nomination for U.S. Senate seat from Michigan; ran second in field of six.

1987 Appointed member of the Board of Regents of the University of Michigan; won election in 1990, receiving more than 1 million votes; defeated in 1998.

## EDUCATION

University College, Oxford, England (Marshall Scholar)  
BA and MA in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Honors)

University of Michigan, graduate study

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan  
BA, summa cum laude, in history, political science and biology  
Elected to Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, Student Government Council  
Editorial Director of the Michigan Daily (student newspaper)

## PERSONAL

Married to Kathleen K. Power. Two sons, Scott Thomas Sutton, M.D. and Nathan Eugene Power