

## Commencement Speech

Friday, May 18, 2018, Westchester County Center

Purchase College 46<sup>th</sup> Commencement Exercises: Class of 2018

Thomas J. Schwarz, President

On April 30th *The New York Times* ran a full page article entitled “After Prairie Fires, Strangers Send Help in Bales”. The article was about trucks of hay that were delivered to ranchers in Oklahoma after wildfires burned the prairie. Without the hay these ranchers would not have been able to feed their cattle.

The hay came from as far as Michigan, more than 1000 miles away, sent by ranchers who didn’t know the Oklahoma ranchers. It was free. As one of them said: “It’s just what you do.”

What struck me about the article were two things: The sending of the free hay was a much bigger story than the wildfires had been. And, second, how the free hay reminded me of what I have seen on this campus for years: Purchase students coming to the aid of Purchase students whether known to them or not.

What tied the ranchers together from all over the country was only that they were all ranchers. Very few knew the ranchers they were helping.

Here, of course, on the Purchase campus more often students do know each other. But I realized that when I step back from the existing student body and look at those who came before – the alumni – there is more of a parallel.

Purchase students help Purchase students and Purchase alumni help Purchase alumni, as well as students who they do not know. I have seen time and again students getting internships or jobs with Purchase alumni whether in the arts or elsewhere and their only connection was Purchase, just like the ranchers out west whose only connection was ranching.

You have helped and supported each other here many times, both in good times and most recently in tragic. I am constantly moved to see how you support each other in your senior projects and presentations; how when you believe there has been an injustice you rise to the occasion.

You are about to join the Purchase Alumni – a group of 17,000 people in the arts, in business, in education - all over the country and indeed, the world.

You need to continue to reach out and support each other. Use LinkedIn and other social media to find Purchase Alumni who are in professional fields you want to join or cities in which you want to live. I think you will find they will be happy to help. Don't think that this little act of reaching out is inconsequential. Just making the contact could have life changing consequences – a new friend, a job, even a partner. Small acts often have large consequences. And now that you are about to be alumni our alumni office is available to help you as well.

A bale is straw, bundled together. You too are bundled together by your connection to Purchase. And if you send bales to someone you don't know, who knows what you may get in return.

Thank you and God bless you.

Thomas J. Schwarz, President

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