

## Eakin Urges 2000 Graduates to 'Go Forth With Pride'

Following are excerpts from the text of the speech given by Chancellor Richard Eakin at fall commencement on Dec. 9.

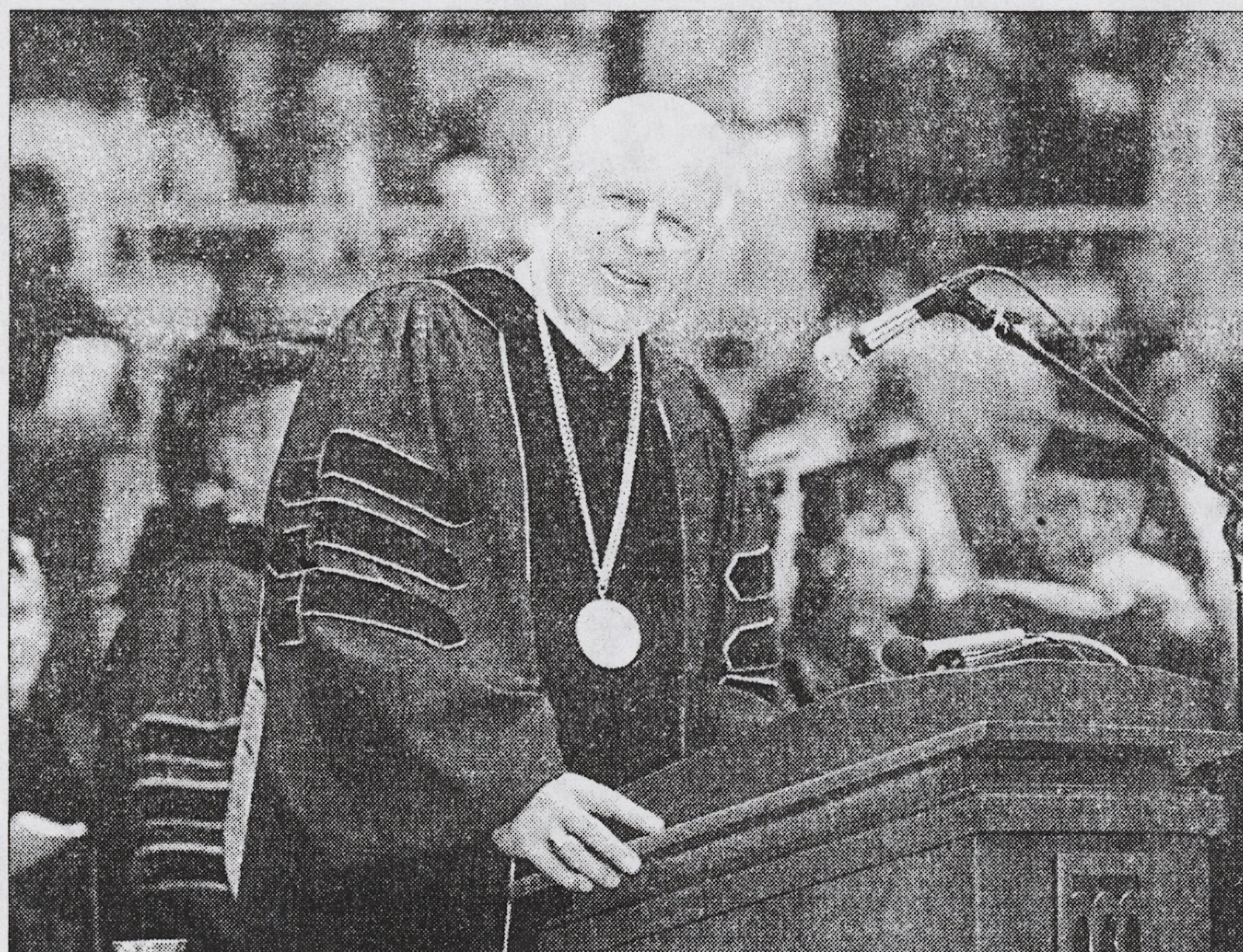
It was nearly 14 years ago that my wife, Jo, and I first came to East Carolina. We came, like most new chancellors, anxious for a new undertaking and, yet, a bit awestruck at the new challenges before us. I would guess that our feelings that day were not appreciably different from yours today, eager to fly but not entirely sure of the strength of our wings. Yet, fly we did.

We had not even unpacked the moving boxes when we were called to our first social engagement. It was a dinner with a student group at the country club. I clearly labeled myself as a Yankee by putting a generous measure of sweetener into what I was to learn was sweet tea. I managed to drink it as though that's the way I liked it.

A week later, while addressing a group of grade school visitors to the University, I welcomed them to Eastern Carolina University. The staff member who organized the visit, excused my mistake by telling the students, "He's new and, besides, he's not from around here."

And, of course she was right — I was new and clearly not from around here. That became even clearer when we had the first substantial snow in Greenville. I had been warned that snow was a fairly big deal here, but I couldn't figure out why. One evening the weather forecast called for as much as (gasp) six inches of snow overnight. Immediately, I began getting calls asking if I was going to cancel classes the next day. In my most reassuring manner, I informed the callers that, indeed, we would have classes as scheduled, that six inches of snow wasn't so much after all.

It was very early in the morning when I was awakened by an urgent call from the vice chancellor. "Have you looked outside? There is snow everywhere." I looked, and he was right, it was everywhere, about six inches deep. I acknowledged the snow and told him I



Chancellor Eakin praised graduates at fall commencement Dec. 9, noting that the Class of 2000 was the first to complete their education after the floods following Hurricane Floyd. He commended the volunteer efforts of the class, who reached out to others even as they were suffering their own losses. (Photo by Tony Rumble)

would see him at work, that we were having classes as scheduled.

At about 8:00 a.m., I drove from my home to the campus (about half a block) and noticed something very strange. There was only one other car on the campus, that was the vice chancellor's. It was then that it hit me. If that silly chancellor from up north wants to have classes today, he's welcome to it, but everyone else is staying home!

And so it was that I began to learn to listen, to understand the ways of North Carolina, and to become more and more "from around here."

I hope you noticed this week that I have learned. We canceled classes Monday because of the snow storm.

I know that I speak for all of my faculty and staff colleagues when I tell you how very proud we are of you and your accomplishments. You are the tangible evidence of our work. You carry with you the intellectual skills and understandings that will allow you to contribute to the strength of our economy, the vitality of our common society, and the full expression of our humanity.

As graduates of the class of 2000, you have a number of distinguishing characteristics. You are the first graduates of a new age. The year 2000 has been widely hailed as the beginning of a new era. It is a time of genuine excitement in the marking of our modern times. If you will permit me one last lesson in your ECU course, though, the year 2000 is not the first year of the millennium. January 1, 2001 will mark the start of the millennium, although it will be celebrated only by me and a few other purists. This is what happens to people like me who earn their doctorates in mathematics.

Since earning that degree, I have had the good fortune to spend a 36-year career in higher education. Along the way, and over the 26 preceding years —

yes, that makes me 62 years old — I have had some experiences that just might be worth sharing with you. I have learned that:

- Intelligence is a valuable commodity whose value is only fully realized through old-fashioned hard work.
- There is no substitute in a marriage for the liberal use of two words; "yes, dear."
- When faced with the choice between honesty and expediency, be honest.
- There is no more liberating experience than a top-down ride in a convertible.
- The first job out of college should be selected with care, but with the knowledge that it is not likely to determine the destiny of a career.
- Friends are a blessing, but it is family that sustains us.
- Dimples are good on babies and bad on ballots.
- Most people have good hearts and consciously or innately practice the golden rule.
- Faith is the underpinning of any truly successful venture.
- Whether we wish for it or not, each of us will have a real and lasting effect on the lives of others, even those in generations to come.
- The admonition to say or write nothing that you wouldn't want quoted on the front page of *The New York Times* has great merit.
- Peace is better than war, honor surpasses deceit, and love overcomes hate.

And I have learned something that many of you have recently demonstrated. That is that volunteers are the foundation of a vital community; serving others without compensation is a duty and a joy.

When I arrived on this campus nearly

fourteen years ago, there was an aura of negativism in the air. It was palpable. It was, like my first snow in North Carolina, everywhere, and considerably more than six inches deep. That negativism took the form of an inferiority complex, a belief that we were second or third best.

Let the record be set straight on this matter. We are not second or third rate. You are graduates of one of the finest universities in the nation. Your education and your university will stand you in good stead around the nation and even the world. We must first recognize that truth and then we must stop our self-deprecating rhetoric. To be tall you must stand tall. Take pride in your university. It is worthy of your pride.

Recently, I had the occasion to review the papers of Robert Wright, the first president of our University, which was then called East Carolina Teacher Training School. In Nov., 1909 he said:

"If we are to keep our people apace with the times, if the future North Carolinian is to measure up favorably, as he has heretofore done with the citizen from other states, he must be given an equal start with the citizen in other states.

I do not fear our native ability; neither do I fear the spirit of our people. We will give to the rising generation the purest inheritance of the nation and better preparation than has ever been given to a preceding generation."

And so it is today. You are equipped with "better preparation than has ever been given to a preceding generation." It is now for you to go forth and take your rightful place in the life of our state and our nation.

**Go forth** from this place with exuberance filled with passion, with joy, with a zest for living.

**Go forth** with pride, knowing that your university experience has made you ready to make a significant contribution.

**Go forth** remembering the wisdom of the ages, always ready to learn afresh from the lessons of the past.

**Go forth** with respect for the rights of others, according kindnesses not expected in return.

**Go forth** with high expectations for yourself and your nation, realizing that personal and national success are grounded in hard work, perseverance, and devotion to duty.

**Go forth** with a sense of awe, seeing through a glass darkly, filled with the wonder of a world still little understood by mortals.

And finally,

**Go forth** with hope, believing that even in the midst of humanity's troubled state, peace and understanding can come to those who seek truth.

### Pieces of Eight

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