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Bergen County Community College
Commencement Exercises
Keynote Address
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Good morning. Thank you for inviting me to speak on this wonderful occasion.

Congratulations, Class of 2008!

You are graduating at an extraordinary time.

You can blink your eyes today and miss something significant, which is a measure of how rapidly the world is changing.

In a few months, our nation will elect a new president.

Two of the leading candidates are an African American and a woman.

No matter how the election turns out, the diversity of the leading candidates is something important to celebrate.

It is a sight to behold when this land of opportunity creates more opportunities.

With your degree, this is precisely what you have: more opportunities.

No matter what your specific career path may be, you will have the opportunity to shape not only a better county, but a better country and also a better world.

One of the most widely respected historians of our time is Professor Bernard Lewis of Princeton University.

Professor Lewis recently observed that we may be at a decisive moment, where we leave one period of history and enter another.

He said, "...there are times in the long history of the human adventure when we have a real turning point, a major change – the end of an era, the beginning of a new era."

Professor Lewis went on to say, "I am becoming more and more convinced that we are in such an age at the present time."

Think about the revolutionary changes during your lifetime.

Who had heard of the Internet 20 years ago? Or cell phones?

Twenty years ago, people didn't stare at blackberries. They spread them on bread...or left them to the birds.

In the past 20 years, a tiny fraction of human history, the world's population has grown by 1.5 billion people...and it continues to grow.

In another 10 years, our world will have about a billion more people to house, clothe and feed.

They will want electricity and other things we take for granted.

They will want safe drinking water, access to education and a decent chance in life.

Meeting these needs will be a huge challenge.

Yet, another challenge is perhaps the greatest of all because it affects the environment on which all life depends.

It is climate change.

Climate change concerns us all, and we need to act now to safeguard our planet.

Winston Churchill once said, the United States can be relied on to do the right thing – if you give them long enough.

The science is saying: We do not have long.

Global warming is real...and our nation needs to get real about it by adopting an aggressive program to reduce greenhouse gases.

Recently, we had a session for our executives with Dr. James Hansen of NASA's center for space studies.

Dr. Hansen was one of the first scientists to warn the public about climate change – something he did about 20 years ago.

Dr. Hansen told us that if he made any mistake over the years, it has been to underestimate the pace at which climate change is happening.

To put his conclusion simply, climate change is accelerating...with consequences no one can foresee.

New Jersey is targeting an 80 percent reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050.

You can debate whether a 60, 70 or 80 percent reduction is needed, but we believe New Jersey is doing the right thing in calling for dramatic carbon reductions.

Our federal government needs to do the same.

This is not the first time our nation has faced difficult energy issues.

Thirty-five years ago, as a result of an embargo imposed by several oil-producing nations, we had long lines at gas stations and wore sweaters in our homes.

Following the embargo, for awhile our nation focused on reducing energy demand and improving fuel efficiency.

But when conditions eased, we slipped back into old ways.

We put conservation on the back burner. We put the sweaters back in the closet.

Our vehicles got larger – much larger. We guzzled more gas and became more dependent on foreign oil.

How can we ensure things will be different this time? Especially since, we have heard all the excuses for delay: ‘The science isn’t definitive.’ ‘What’s the use unless China and India do it?’

Amazing when you think about it...The reasons for delay vary from ‘there is no problem’ to ‘the problem is too big.’!

Despite the naysayers, despite the doubters, I don’t despair: There is another way of looking at this issue....

Climate change is not only a threat, ignored at our peril. It is an opportunity to apply the enormous capacity of this nation to innovate and chart a new path of sustainable growth.

A large part of the solution will involve three key things:

- **First, doing all we can to promote energy efficiency;**
- **Second, expanding renewable energy such as solar, wind and biomass; and**
- **Third, to the extent needed, developing additional power resources with low-carbon emissions, or best of all, zero emissions.**

Our company is strongly committed to greening the future using these tools.

But a green future won’t happen if we only think of it as something done for people, rather than by people.

My generation remembers the Apollo project and the pride our nation felt in putting a man on the moon.

Apollo was an extraordinary triumph of human ingenuity and teamwork, involving a large commitment of resources.

Yet most of us experienced it vicariously, glued to the TV.

We do not have the luxury of being couch potatoes when it comes to climate change.

Everyone can make a difference. Even small steps add up.

One example: If every U.S. household replaced one traditional light bulb with an energy-efficient compact fluorescent bulb, utility customers would save 600 million dollars and enough energy to light three million homes each year.

My advice is, be part of the climate solution.

And look for other ways to improve the life of your community.

In this extraordinary time, I urge you to define success by more than what you do for a living.

By the way, getting involved in the community can develop leadership skills that translate into greater career success.

I have seen this happen countless times with our employees, who have a great tradition of contributing to their communities.

Remember, every challenge holds the seeds of an opportunity.

The challenge of climate change offers the opportunity to chart a new course of environmentally responsible and sustainable economic growth.

Greening the economy will produce thousands of new jobs in fields like research and development, sales and marketing, engineering, manufacturing, construction, business support services and more.

Be on the lookout for these opportunities. One of them may be right for you.

Some have suggested we are at an environmental tipping point. But if you become involved, instead we may be at a turning point toward a safer, healthier planet.

Let's do it. Thank you.