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Lockhart headlines 2000 Commencement

Jim Stewart '76
Furman University

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Proud members of the Class of 2000 heard Keith Lockhart (below) suggest that they “decide on a destination, and the route will take care of itself.”



Lockhart headlines 2000 Commencement

Few Furman graduates have made as big a splash in the last few years as Keith Lockhart '81, conductor of the Boston Pops.

As head of the most popular and best known orchestra in the country since 1995, Lockhart has toured the world, made recordings and conducted performances before millions of people. But when he stepped on the makeshift stage at Paladin Stadium May 27 to deliver his first Commencement address, he admitted to feeling nervous.

He hoped, he said, to be profound, to say something meaningful and lasting. Yet he acknowledged that this would be a difficult task, considering that, as his research showed, the Commencement address is usually the low point of these ceremonial occasions. And he admitted that, although he has many fond memories of his Furman days, “the Commencement address at my graduation is not one of them.”

Not surprisingly, though, he seized the moment, entertaining and encouraging over

600 bachelor's and master's degree candidates and their families and friends with his story of seeking, searching and finding.

Lockhart, who also conducts the Utah Symphony, advised the graduates not to worry if they left Furman feeling somewhat rudderless and without direction. He recalled how during his undergraduate days he did a little of everything, from sampling a wide variety of courses, playing intramurals and traveling abroad to performing in circus bands and with an Elvis impersonator. “I had a great time,” he said. “I learned; I grew. And, at the end of four years, I had no earthly idea what to do with all that accumulated wisdom.”

But he had his Furman education as a foundation to help him take full advantage of what life would offer. As he said, “Every life has thousands upon thousands of forks and branches. College is not a bow; you are not an arrow; and the point of education is not to allow you to fly straight across your life without hitting anything except the imaginary target at the end. What you did here was not so much learn as . . . learn to learn.

“With apologies to my professors here, I remember few specifics from the courses I took, and I’ve thrown all my notebooks away. I’m positive, though, that I use my years at Furman in every decision I make, both the substantial and the trivial. The great thing about a school like this is that it is not a trade school. It doesn’t encourage you to narrow your focus; it encourages you to broaden it, to think, and to keep learning.”

In addition to delivering the Commencement address, Lockhart received an honorary Doctor of Humanities degree in recognition of his accomplishments as a conductor and musical ambassador. Irwin Belk, a North Carolina businessman and civic leader whose generosity led to the renovation of Furman’s track complex, also received a Doctor of Humanities degree to recognize his achievements in business and in public service.

Three students shared the Scholarship Cup, which is awarded to the graduate with the highest academic average. Completing their Furman careers with straight-A averages were biology majors Richard Brooks of Harriman, Tenn., and Daniell Farrier of Ashland, Ohio, and education major Rima Dakhllallah of Travelers Rest, S.C.

General Excellence Awards, given by the faculty to the outstanding senior man and woman, went to Ginger Denison of Greensboro, N.C., a summa cum laude graduate in chemistry, and Stuart Rentz of Pickens, S.C., a summa cum laude graduate in business administration and Spanish. Denison plans graduate study at Indiana University, and Rentz has received a Fulbright fellowship for a year in Mexico.

Bill Prince, professor of Spanish, and Ron Granieri, assistant professor of history, received the Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Teaching. Jack Dickey, director of continuing education, and Gil Fairbanks, retiring professor of biology, received the Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Advising.

— Jim Stewart

