**Year 12 Graduation 2014 – box of chocolates theme**

**Dianne Marshall**

Good morning. I would like to add my very warm welcome to everyone here today – our special guests and sponsors, parents and friends, staff and of course the graduating Year 12 students. I must say to begin, that this has been an incredibly rewarding year and I feel very privileged to be the Director of the Senior College.

I know I don’t need to sell it to Year 12 students, as you have all experienced the uniqueness of the Senior College. You have made new friends, learned more about yourself – what you like doing, what you definitely don’t like doing and how you learn best. I hope that you are feeling ready for the next stage in your life.

Today we acknowledge students’ achievements and contributions to the college. Shortly each of you will be presented and we will hear some of your accomplishments.

Most have been with us for two years and I hope you have found the experience has exceeded your expectations. I acknowledge it must have been a big decision to leave the known and venture into the unknown. I believe this is a really important learning experience which prepares you for the next stage of your life.

I was trying to think of something profound to say today and thought of this quote from the movie Forrest Gump. *“My mama always said life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re gonna get.”*

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It is 20 years since the movie was released but it still resonates with me as I have certainly had, and most importantly enjoyed, a lot of different career directions since I finished Year 12. I hope you enjoy some of my box of chocolates journey.

I remember being your age and firmly having in my mind where I was going. My box of chocolates was in neat rows and I thought I knew what all the fillings were going to contain in my carefully mapped out future. I was going to be a teacher and do my degree at a particular university. I had researched the college, knew all about the course, and knew what ATAR I needed.

So off I went to this university and found my first chocolate had an unusual flavour that I hadn’t tasted before. It was a bit confronting and I didn’t like it at all. After six weeks I realised it wasn’t going to get any more palatable and I negotiated a place at another university.

So I happily settled in at the new uni and my chocolate box was ordered again with lovely smooth-centred chocolates.

But life isn’t always ordered and at the end of that year my Dad got a transfer to manage a branch of the engineering firm he worked for in Adelaide, and all my family left within two months. I decided to stay in Sydney and my chocolate box suddenly became very sparse with very bland chocolates.

I suppose it is not surprising that the sparse chocolate box became a bit of an issue and so I followed the family to Adelaide in my third year of my four year degree. Once again the chocolate box became ordered and full of smooth-centred chocolates.

I am a person who likes variety in my chocolates, so when I went on a holiday to Perth near the end of my degree, I found new and exciting flavours of chocolate and stayed there for 20 years.

Since then I have had a varied career from schools to head office. I have dabbled in financial management, building and renovating schools, various leadership roles including leading a system of schools. One of my most interesting roles was working with IT specialists on the DER program, learning the language of IT and managing a $447 million budget.

Over the course of my career I sometimes found the chocolate was chilli hot, and sometimes toffee-filled which pulls out your fillings. Sometimes it was a flavour I didn’t want to have too often, but many times it was rich and smooth.

And here I am now at the Senior College with lots more chocolates to look forward to.

So why do I like this quote and why did I decide to tell you my story? It is important to enjoy all the different experiences and opportunities that will present themselves to you. Some will be planned, others will be unexpected. All of them will help to shape who you are and what you believe in.

I encourage you to pursue your hopes and dreams no matter how difficult or ‘different’ they may seem to others. The worst thing in life is to look back and say, *“I would have; I could have; I should have.”* Take risks, make mistakes and ENJOY the journey. Each of you is unique and your contribution is important.

Today is all about you and the potential that you have and the decisions that you will make.

On behalf of the staff, we wish you every success in the upcoming examinations. We also wish you a happy life full of joy and wonder.

I wish to acknowledge the support and cooperation of many people and organisations.

* Firstly, our partners, Southern Cross University and the North Coast Institute of TAFE. This place is unique and offers many opportunities for our students which we are always building upon.
* Also a big thank you to the staff of the Senior College who work tirelessly to support each of you to achieve your potential. I am always amazed when I walk around the college and see students in offices with the staff getting individualised support, the extra lessons during the holidays, and the after school hours given to support HSC programs and major works.
* A special thank you to the parents who have supported their sons and daughters through the stress of assessment tasks and examinations. I know sometimes your advice is ignored even though it was coming from experience. I am sure that each student here will make the time to say thank you today and again at some time in the future.
* To our sponsors, many of whom are with us today and will be part of the ceremony. Thank you for your generous support. The College greatly values this support.
* Special thanks to everyone involved in the organisation and running of today’s ceremony, and also to [Names of teachers] who have put in an enormous amount of work in supporting Year 12 and organising tomorrow’s formal.

It now gives me great pleasure to announce the top ATAR award for 2013. This award is sponsored by Southern Cross University and is presented by Professor David Lynch.

Thank you.

**Contributor details**

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Dianne has been Principal of Coffs Harbour Senior College since December 2013. Currently she is also a President of NSWSPC North Coast Region and a Member of the SPC Executive with the Student Wellbeing Portfolio and Senior Schools Interest Group. Her current interests include riding her e-bike, walking and reading.