Robert Bobb urges hope at Walsh graduation

Published: Sunday, January 31, 2010

By DAVE PHILLIPS
Of The Oakland Press

Speaking during Walsh College’s 94th commencement ceremony Saturday morning, Robert Bobb shared part of his plan to improve Detroit Public Schools.

The strategy came down to one simple word — hope.

“With hope, we can seize the invisible, feel the intangible and achieve the impossible,” said Bobb, emergency financial manager for Detroit Public Schools.

Bobb’s keynote speech at Zion Christian Church in Troy came after he was awarded an honorary doctor of laws degree.

“Leadership and community service are the clarion of public service,” Bobb said. “There are many inspiring reasons for devoting yourself to public good. It will bring you great fulfillment and a chance to change the world.”

Bobb urged each of the 449 graduates to strive to instill hope in others.

“Work constantly to instill hope — hope into your organization, constituents, customers, employees and co-workers,” he said.

Bobb said several people have brought hope to students of Detroit Public Schools by donating more
than 504,000 hours of service in the past year to help children learn to read at or above their grade level.

After speaking about President John F. Kennedy’s promise to put a man on the moon before the 1960s were over, Bobb made a pledge of his own.

“By 2015, we will have every child in Detroit Public Schools reading at or above grade level by third grade,” Bobb said. “That is our goal.”

“There is a sense more than ever ... that better days are ahead,” Bobb said. “We’re on a safe and secure route to bringing hope to 80,000 students in Detroit Public Schools.”

One way to instill that hope, Bobb said, is to bring back the Detroit Public Schools citywide marching band, a move that was made Thursday.

“Three hundred and twenty-five band uniforms have been sitting dormant in storage since 2004,” Bobb said. “We’re bringing hope by bringing the band back to march through the city, state and country.”

“Hope is the companion of power and the mother of society,” Bobb said. “He or she who hopes so strongly has the gift in him or her of miracles.”

In closing, Bobb quoted Martin Luther King Jr.

“We should accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope,” Bobb said.

Walsh College President Stephanie Bergeron said the graduating class will encounter some unique challenges.

“Seventy-eight million baby boomers will retire in the next 10 years,” Bergeron said.

“With all this change, there’s gonna be a war for talent. Companies will be looking for the best and the brightest and you will be ready.”

Rochester Hills resident Chelsea Papp, who received her Master of Business Administration degree, represented graduate students with a speech at the ceremony.

“All of us are on a journey to somewhere,” she said. “Life is a journey with chapters like a novel.”

After describing lessons learned at each stop, Papp described one of the most important ones she’s ever learned — “you’re not going to be good at everything, but with a little push, you can overcome anything.

“Use the momentum of your new degree to be your push,” Papp told the graduating class. “Make the year 2010 one to remember in your novel called life.”

Contact staff writer Dave Phillips at 248-745-4631 or dave.phillips@oakpress.com.