

## **Hold on to your dreams**

By Jeff Thielman

On behalf of my School Committee colleagues Sean Garballey, Susan Lovelace, Suzanne Owayda, Sue Sheffler, Paul Schlichtman, and Marty Thrope, I am pleased to congratulate you, the class of 2005.

You are the sons and daughters of Arlington, Massachusetts, a wonderful, dynamic and diverse community that has generously invested in you and in your education. We have been privileged to have you with us, and we wish you the very best in the years to come.

We congratulate as well your parents, grandparents, siblings and friends who have gathered here today to cheer you on. They watched you take your first steps, celebrated your achievements along the way, and are excited about your future.

Whenever I speak with a student from Arlington High School, I come away impressed by your kindness, your intelligence, and your desire to serve others.

While community service is required at AHS, it is clear to me that you do it not because you're obligated to, but because you want to. As one of your classmates remarked in last week's Arlington Advocate, when you, the members of the Class of 2005 saw a need, you were not afraid to make change. The creation of the Friends of the Behavioral Intervention Program or BIP Club by Ellen Morello and others is just one of the many contributions your class has made to Arlington.

I met some of you a few years ago when members of Students against Violations of the Environment (SAVE) helped put markers throughout the Spy Pond basin. The markers told citizens not to pour paint and gasoline down storm drains that flowed to the pond. Those of you involved with the project cared about the environment, and I remember talking to several of you who were passionate about making Arlington and the world a cleaner and healthier place.

When I ask your teachers about you, they say there is goodness in each of you. They tell me some of the essays you've written and some of the work you've done has touched them in profound ways. They feel fortunate to be your teachers.

Of course, you were not perfect during all of your time in the Arlington Public Schools. Sometimes your minds wandered during class, and you imagined yourselves doing something else. Maybe you dreamed of spending time with friends, or playing sports, or appearing on Broadway. There is a good chance you dreamed of doing something wonderful and unique, something that would leave your mark on the world.

I'm here to tell you that the dreams you had here at Arlington High School were real and significant. My message to you today is that as you grow older you must hold onto to those dreams and you must not let them go.

During high school I had a dream of going someplace to work with and serve very poor people. It was something I thought about when I was bored with classroom discussion and a dream I reflected on even more during my college years.

When I graduated from college, I made my way to Tacna, Peru, where I spent three years living and working among the poor as a volunteer. Shortly after I arrived in Peru, I met a group of children shining shoes in order to feed themselves and their families. I wondered what could be done to help these kids and began working with some people to launch a program called the Center for the Working Child. Almost 20 years later, nearly 5,000 youngsters and members of their families have received medical care, academic assistance, housing, food service and technical training at the Center for the Working Child of Tacna, Peru.

I had a dream. I didn't quite know what it was when I was in high school, but I refused to let it go.

Let me tell you about Dr. Paul Farmer, the founder of Partners in Health, a program that serves the poor in seven countries on three continents. Farmer spent his high school years living in a bus and later in a boat in the Deep South with his five brothers and sisters. When he was growing up and when he was in high school, he had a desire to do some good in the world. He thought it might be in medicine, but he wasn't sure.

Farmer nurtured that dream he had back in high school, and after graduating from Harvard Medical School, he established a clinic in Haiti to serve the poor. Eventually he set up clinics in other countries, and he brought radical change to the way the poorest people in the world received medical treatment.

Farmer is a man who likes to defy conventional wisdom. When told that it wasn't worthwhile to treat a particular strand of tuberculosis because it cost too much money, Farmer treated people with this terrible disease anyway. When 85% of his patients were cured, other doctors, including those who criticized him, took notice and began treating people in the Third World with the disease known as multi-drug resistant tuberculosis.

Eventually, several pharmaceutical companies made the drug needed to cure the disease, the cost of treatment went down and thousands of lives were saved. By challenging traditional assumptions, Farmer not only saved lives, he changed the world.

When asked about he had done, Dr. Farmer quoted anthropologist Margaret Meade, who said: "Never underestimate the ability of a small group of committed people to change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Change begins with a dream. People like Dr. Paul Farmer, who literally changed the world, have dreams, and they do not let them go.

Some of the world's most significant achievements are the result of dreams people have when they are your age.

Today, my friends, your future is like a white sheet of paper, and you can write anything you want on it. You have no idea how much talent you really have and how much good you can do in this world. Inside each and every one of you is enormous potential. As the next stage of your life's journey begins, I urge you to think about and test a bit the dreams you've had during your time at Arlington High School.

No dream is insignificant. Your dream may be the start of something wonderful. It may change the world.

Hold on to your dreams, Class of 2005, and do not let them go.

*Jeff Thielman is the Chairman of the Arlington School Committee. This is the address he gave at the commencement on June 12<sup>th</sup>.*