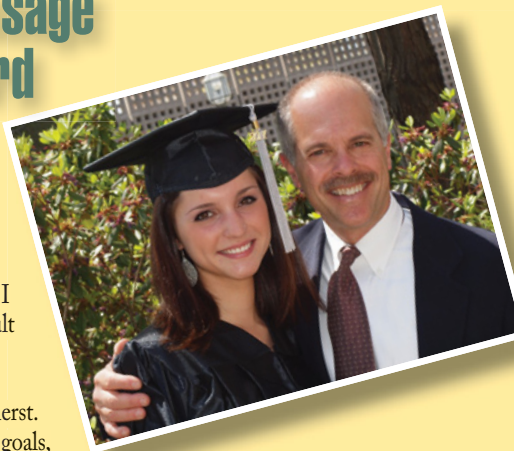




## Tom's Message Board

### The Graduate II

My June 2009 message was devoted to our daughter's high school graduation. Fast forward to June 2011. Once again, with pride, I write about our beautiful young adult who has reached another milestone in her journey earning an A.S. in equine industries from UMass Amherst. Meeting her academic and personal goals, she has grown considerably from her college experiences, made new friends and connections, and is now armed and ready to face the real world. But what IS the real world?



In my day (ugh), the real world meant landing a job in a graduate's major and climbing the corporate ladder! Often, this coincided with getting married and starting a family. I'm 55 and many of my high school and college classmates have grandchildren! I took a different path. Six months after graduation, a buddy and I crammed as much as we could into my Honda Accord, drove west, and didn't stop until the road ended at the Santa Monica pier. We got jobs in L.A. and for the next year let our hair down (I could actually do that back then) and lived the quintessential Southern California lifestyle. When we had our fill, we returned to Burlington. I picked up a job waiting tables and for the next four years lived a ski/windsurf/biking lifestyle – physically and outdoor active by day, hustling for [quite good] tips at night. I loved every day and credit them as saving me from having a mid-life crisis...right about now! It was at this time I met Sue, my best friend and now wife of 25 years. I look back at this free-wheeling and serendipitous path and realize that, not only would I not change any of it, but this is what I wish for Abby! Today's graduates are abundantly mobile, virtually connected and poised to follow the enjoy-it-while-you're-still-young path which, at only 20 years old, is my advice to Abby.

That's the elevated view. The ground level view carries a bit of an edge, which she's discovering even as I write this. With school and studies done, the real world is hangin' on every corner; with a thing called a budget for her Amherst apartment, job prospecting, and time management. Like her ol' dad, she has her eye on California to spend time with her close friend Claire who lives in LA, and also a trip to Ireland to visit Shauna, her friend from last summer's internship. This all takes moola so she's now working two jobs to make ends meet and save for these adventures. With her lifelong money tree reduced to a money bush, she's learning very quickly what life after graduation is all about. But she's getting it, and doing it, and once again, she does us proud!

Graduation, at any level, is simply an achievement and milestone marked with an official stamp of completion. It's the now moment in what we live as the real world. Sue and I have always tried to teach Abby to look ahead and prepare a plan for what's desired, but at the same time remain present, make the best of each moment, and take care of herself and the people around her. As she takes one more step towards forming her own independent life, our graduate continues to be a source of pride with her relaxed ego, her knowledge and love of herself, and her gaze ahead. I'm a proud dad.

Flip the tassel, take a deep breath, and you GO Abby!

*Tom*

Tom Brassard, President