

**Graduation Speech by Mr. Lewis W Owens to the University of South Australia Graduation Ceremony, Whyalla Campus on Friday 13 April, 2012**

Chancellor, Vice –Chancellor, Academic Staff, Graduates, families and friends of the graduates , and other guests.

It is indeed a pleasure to be here today to share with you the celebration of the success of these graduates.

I am particularly thrilled to be doing this in the Middleback Theatre, as to me (as Chair of the Country Arts SA Board) it is important to see this cultural facility being used as an integral part of the life of this city. Because while we are focussed today on employment and education, there is much more to life – culture, family, community are equally important elements.

Country towns have been under considerable pressure over the years to survive and thrive: Whyalla itself has had many ups and downs as important industries thrive and then decline or disappear. And then new opportunities appear, as now with the impact of the so-called mining boom .

Having grown up in Broken Hill, I share with you a knowledge of these challenges and their impact on people and families. Like you, I first studied at the local university while I worked in the mines – I understand the difficulties of part-time study and the distractions of other pressures in a small community. And the limited career choices available – I had no knowledge of a career outside of mining: certainly medicine, the law or commerce were careers I never considered.

But these challenges from living in a small community provide you with certain skills and advantages relative to those who are given the luxury of full-time study at a capital city campus. You have to be more independent, more resilient, more creative to be successful here. Balancing work and study gives you skills in handling multiple tasks and prioritising – very important skills in the workplace.

You will have been told many times that the workplace of the future will require workers to be more flexible in their skills; that you will have multiple career changes, that it is unlikely you will remain with a single employer all your working life (like some of our parents did).

My father worked underground for 42 years for the same employer, doing the same job all his working life. I consider myself a pretty average sort of bloke, but in this one respect I was different and ahead of my time, in that I had that sort of career talked about for the future - I changed jobs on a regular basis and moved into quite different fields (I had 15

different jobs over my 42 years, and my last four jobs over 20 years as a CEO covered workers compensation, investment, regulation and electricity utility; even now, as a Director, I cover a water utility, arts and geothermal exploration!). My initial engineering degree was hardly used after the first few years, as other fields beckoned. And, with not an artistic bone in my body, I now Chair the body responsible for the arts across country South Australia! Which goes to show, anything is possible!

So, if frequently changing jobs is the future, I have seen it and lived it. And it is exciting!

You today are graduating in many different fields covering health, commerce and industry, and the opportunities are immense both here in Whyalla and beyond. But you will need to continue to study, to change industries, to challenge yourself in new or unknown fields, to move around, to build your career by seeing the common threads and links across fields, and applying these in new ways.

I am sure that studying here in Whyalla equips you with the skills to take advantage of these workplace changes; to become leaders in your fields of work, and to continue to grow and develop. Hopefully, you will apply these skills not just to your work, but to other areas in the community – in sport, at schools, for charities, and for the overall development of the communities in which you live. The skills you have learnt in earning your degree at the University will be added to and developed further as you progress through life.

Today, however, we are here to congratulate you on your success to date and to acknowledge the hard work and commitment that has been necessary for you to achieve this. Well done, and enjoy the reward.

We are also here to acknowledge the support and encouragement provided by your family and friends – without that, you may not have graduated. So that it why it is doubly satisfying to be celebrating here today, as it is an opportunity for all those involved to share in the joy of your success.

But to end on a word of caution: this is the beginning, not the end of your education. You now have some formal recognition of your capabilities, but you will need to continue to dedicate yourself to learning new skills and competencies, if you are to build a successful career and contribute back to society what it has given you up to now.

I wish you well as you go down this path, as you face the challenges of the future. And if your mix of work and life is as varied and interesting as mine has been, you will be truly blessed.