

Judge Brandon O. Gibson offers practical wisdom to graduating class

Chad Danter started college in 2012 at the University of Tennessee at Martin, knowing that a college degree was necessary to move ahead in his career. He realized his dream May 5 as he joined more than 600 graduates who received degrees during spring commencement in the university's Kathleen and Tom Elam Center. Judge Brandon O. Gibson, one of 12 Tennessee Court of Appeals judges, was commencement speaker.

Danter, of Dyersburg, knows about hard work. He was raised on a New Jersey dairy farm and joined the U.S. Navy following graduation from high school in 1987. He served as an electronics technician at the now-closed Roosevelt Roads Naval Station in Puerto Rico until 1992 and then at the Naval Air Station (NAS) Memphis in Millington until he left the military for civilian life in 1995.

He began a career in food manufacturing that same year with Tootsie Roll Industries at the Charms Company in Covington. Six years later, he joined The Hershey Company in Memphis where he was promoted to maintenance supervisor in 2009 before



Judge Brandon O. Gibson delivers the UT Martin spring commencement address May 5 in the Kathleen and Tom Elam Center.

becoming a line leader in gum packaging in 2017. The Memphis plant produces Ice Cubes gum, as well as Ice Breakers and Breath Savers mints in a competitive world market, so workdays are full as the company grows.

The decision to pursue a college degree offered obvious benefits for Danter, but the path to a degree wasn't easy because of his daunting schedule. Danter

commutes a total of four hours daily from his Dyersburg home to the Hershey facility in Memphis, and 60-plus hour workweeks are the norm. Fortunately, his advanced military training earned him 47 hours of credit toward the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies degree, but all other college credit was earned through the UT Martin Ripley Center and UT Martin Online. His reward for years of

study and effort was graduating Summa Cum Laude with a 4.0 grade point average.

"I have a restless discontent for the status quo," Danter said. "So I don't know how to not do my best at the things that I attempt to do." Those closest to him fully understand his drive for success. "Well, like I've told him a million times, he's the smartest man I've ever met ... so anything he

puts his head to, he does," said his wife, Karen, who is a middle school math teacher. "He's the hardest-working man I've ever known," added his son Benjamin, a photographer for News 2, WKRN-TV in Nashville.

With his new degree in hand, Danter expects career doors to open, and he is grateful to now have extra time for his family and to pursue his passion for golf and flying (he is a pilot). Even though he and his family have sacrificed to reach this moment, he has no regrets about the experience.

"Everything was well worth doing," he said. "I enjoyed almost every class I did. Every one of them had their challenges. There were some challenging professors who wanted more out of me and pushed me to a higher level."

University Chancellor Keith Carver welcomed the capacity Elam Center audience that included graduating students from 56 Tennessee counties, 27 states outside of Tennessee and the countries of Australia, China, India, Russia and Saudi Arabia.

Following a performance by members of the university's Department of Music, Carver introduced

Gibson, who was appointed to the Tennessee Court of Appeals by Gov. Bill Haslam in December 2013 and sworn in Sept. 1, 2014. She was later retained in a statewide retention election in August 2016 and is currently the only female judge sitting on the court. Gibson holds bachelor's and master's degrees from Mississippi State University and a law degree from Southern Methodist University. Her parents attended UT Martin and met when they were students at the university.

Gibson, who is originally from Dyer County, offered graduates and the audience practical wisdom through a countdown of "the top-10 things I wished someone had emphasized to me when I graduated from college." She urged graduates to take time to have fun in the midst of busy careers, to remember that "a college degree is not a golden ticket," and to prepare for failure sometime during their careers.

"Even if you're graduating at the top of your class, you will fail at some point," she said. "But failure is necessary for growth – without it, you'd never mature or progress. What matters the most is how you recover from that failure. Learn

The Weakley County Press congratulates these 3 women.

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UTM Graduate
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