



Bonus | Pioneers of Care: Vet School's Inaugural Class

(Music)

Taylor Peters, Host: IT'S 10:00 O'CLOCK ON SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 18<sup>TH</sup> AND THE DOORS TO THE AMARILLO CIVIC CENTER HAVE JUST BEEN OPENED. HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE FLOOD THROUGH AND BRISKLY WALK INTO AN EMPTY AUDITORIUM. GROUPS OF PEOPLE ARE CHATTERING AND COORDINATING WHERE TO SIT, HOW MANY SEATS TO SAVE, THE LEFT SIDE OF THE AUDITORIUM OR RIGHT, WHERE DO WE THINK OUR GRADUATE WILL ENTER?

IT'S AN IMPORTANT DAY FOR THESE LOVED ONES, AND FOR THE DOZENS OF PEOPLE IN A HOLDING ROOM JUST ACROSS THE HALL. NOT TO MENTION FOR VETERINARIAN CLINICS ACROSS THE STATE AND REGION.

THAT ROOM IS WHERE WE FIND 61 YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE OFTEN REFERRED TO AS PIONEERS. WHAT TRAIL HAVE THEY SPENT 4 YEARS BLAZING, WHAT MAKES THEM SPECIAL? WE'LL TELL YOU ON THIS EPISODE OF FEARLESS.

(Music)

AUSTIN BYRD IS SITTING IN THAT HOLDING ROOM READING THROUGH THE SPEECH HE'S BEEN WRITING OVER THE LAST FEW WEEKS. HE'S THE PRESIDENT OF THIS FIRST GRADUATING CLASS FOR THE TEXAS TECH SCHOOL OF VETERINARY MEDICINE. HE'S ONE OF THE FINAL SPEAKERS SET TO ADDRESS THE CROWD TODAY.

(Music, Pomp and Circumstance)

THROUGH THE SET OF DOUBLE DOORS, THE FAINT SOUND OF POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE CAN BE HEARD AS THE STUDENTS GET INTO FORMATION TO MAKE THEIR ENTRANCE.

John Dascanio, Faculty: Please stay seated as we welcome our inaugural class.

(Cheers)

Peters: THE STUDENTS TAKE THE STAIRS DOWN IN A SINGLE FILE LINE, WAVING AND SMILING AT THEIR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS WHO GREET THEM EAGERLY.

ON THE STAGE IN PLUSH LEATHER CHAIRS ARE A SET OF DISTINGUISHED GUESTS AND SEAKERS INCLUDING TEXAS GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT AND TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY SYSTEM CHANCELLOR EMERITUS ROBERT DUNCAN... ALONG WITH A SERIES OF REGENTS, CHAIRMAN CODY CAMPBELL AND TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY PRESIENT LAWRENCE SCHOVANEC.

Lawrence Schovanec, Texas Tech University President: Will you please rise for a special playing of our national anthem by Dr. Dickson Varner on the harmonica.

(National Anthem on Harmonica)

Peters: DICKSON VARNER IS A FACULTY MEMBER WITH THE VET SCHOOL, A FAMILIAR FACE TO THE STUDENTS... OR SOON TO BE GRADUATES. HIS BIO ON THE WEBSITE SAYS HIS HOBBIES INCLUDE HORSEBACK RIDING, MOUNTAIN MAN EXPLOITS AND MUSIC. HIS WHISPY WHITE AND GRAY HAIR CURLS SOFTLY AT THE TIPS AND HIS THICK BEARD CAN JUST BARELY BE SEEN BEHIND HIS HANDS AS HE PLAYS.

(National Anthem Ends)

(Music Begins)

Greg Abbott, Texas Governor: Being first is significant. Being first is historic...

Peters: THAT'S THE GOVERNOR.

Abbott: Being first requires pushing beyond past limits. It requires breaking down barriers that open up the door of opportunity for others to be able to walk through in future generations. You have done that. You are pioneers, the charter members, as my daughter would put it; you're the OGs, the first graduates of Texas Tech School of Veterinary Medicine in the history of the great state of Texas. Texas is proud of you. Texas needs you.

Robert Duncan, Texas Tech System Chancellor Emeritus: I want to say it again, the first graduating class of the Texas Tech School of Veterinary Medicine. Congrats.

(Applause underneath)

Peters: THIS DAY HAS BEEN A LONG TIME IN THE MAKING FOR A LOT OF PEOPLE, BUT ESPECIALLY FOR ROBERT DUNCAN.

Duncan: This is a bucket list moment for me, your family and you.

Peters: DUNCAN WORKED TIRELESSLY AND MADE CREATION OF THE VET SCHOOL A PRIORITY. AND IN 2016, THE FIRST FORMAL COMMITTEE WAS CREATED. SOLIDIFYING A PLAN AND SETTING IT IN MOTION. MUCH OF HIS TIME AS CHANCELLOR WAS SPENT ADVOCATING, PLANNING, RAISING MONEY AND LEADING THE CHARGE TO BRING US TO THIS DAY.

Duncan: You are exactly what we talked about when we were designing this plan and this strategy to go forward and get another vet school in Texas. Today marks the culmination of your dedication, perseverance and passion. You're not only graduates, but pioneers, trailblazers setting the standard for those who will follow you in your footsteps. You have shown that bold dreams coupled with tireless effort can carve new paths where none existed before. Congratulations Raider vets, the future is yours.

(Applause)

Peters: SENATOR CHARLES PERRY CLAPS ALONG WITH THE AUDIENCE FROM THE FRONT ROW... IN FACT, HE HAS HAD A FRONT ROW SEAT TO THE WHOLE SHOW LEADING UP TO TODAY. THOSE EARLY CONVERSATIONS AND MEETINGS...IN 2019, HE HELD A SHOVEL AND CEREMONIOUSLY TURNED OVER DIRT AT THE SCHOOLS GROUNDBREAKING.

Nancy Carter, Texas Veterinary Medical Association: So, tomorrow, work begins. We're very proud of all of you and we know you're going to do good things.

Peters: DR. NANCY CARTER STEPS UP TO THE PODIUM NOW. SHE'S THE PRESIDENT OF THE TEXAS VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION... HERE TO LEAD THE STUDENTS IN THE VETERINARY OATH.

Carter: Please raise your right hand and repeat after me.

(Music begins)

Carter and Students Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine. I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society. I accept the continual improvement of my professional knowledge.

Congrats!

(Applause)

Schovanec: By the power vested in me, by the Board of Regents for Texas Tech University, I confer upon each of you the degree for which Dr. Dascanio has recommended to you. Congratulations.

Peters: THE FIRST ROW OF STUDENTS STAND, MAKING ITS WAY TO THE STAGE.

Dascanio: The first veterinarian in the first graduating class of the Texas Tech School of Veterinary Medicine is Dr. Kimberly Nicole Arrellano. She is graduating *Magnum Cum Laude*.

Peters: AFTER THEY ARE HOODED, STUDENTS CROSS THE STAGE TO SHAKE THE HANDS OF GOVERNOR ABBOTT AND PRESIDENT SCHOVANEC... THEN MAKE THEIR WAY DOWN THE STAIRS TO BE GREETED BY A SERIES OF OTHER DIGNITARIES.

THE SMILE ON AUSTIN'S FACE IS WIDE AS HE CROSSES THE STAGE, A BURST OF LIGHT FROM THE CAMERA FLASH SECURING THIS MOMENT IN TIME.

HE RETURNS TO HIS SEAT TO CHEER FOR THE REST OF HIS CLASS BEFORE TAKING THE STAGE A SECOND TIME. NOW ALONE UNDER THE LIGHTS FOR HIS BIG SPEECH.

Austin Byrd, Class President: If I'm being honest, I still don't know quite how to put into words how big of a moment this is the joy pride and sheer magnitude of what we've accomplished together. Today it's not just about us. It's about every late night, every exam that made us question whether or not we belonged. It's about every moment we picked each other up when we thought we couldn't

go on. Every time we called our family and friends and needed to hear their encouragement. It's about the path we've created for ourselves but also the path that we've created for everyone else to come after us because we dared to go first.

Peters: IN THE AUDIENCE, AUSTIN'S FAMILY PROUDLY WATCHES- HIS PARENTS AND YOUNGER BROTHERS... IN SO MANY WAYS THEY'VE INSPIRED HIS FUTURE PATH. AUSTIN KNEW WHEN HE WAS 6 THAT HE WANTED TO BE A VET. HIS YOUNGEST BROTHER HAS AUTISM, HE WAS BORN WITH CLUB FEET. IT REQUIRED INTENSIVE SURGERIES AND AUSTIN FOUND HIMSELF ENAMORED WITH THE WHOLE PROCESS. TODAY, AS HE STANDS BEFORE THE CROWD OF A FEW HUNDRED PEOPLE, HE'S JUST DAYS FROM BEGINNING A YEAR-LONG INTERNSHIP FOCUSING ON ORTHOPEDIC SURGERIES FOR SMALL ANIMALS.

Byrd: So to my fellow graduates and to my family in every sense of the word, let us walk forward with courage and let us dare to be great and let's never forget that we were the ones who built this who built the foundation of something that will continue on for generations to come.

Peters: AUSTIN AND EACH OF THESE STUDENTS KNEW IN 2021 WHEN THEY STARTED THIS JOURNEY, THERE WOULD BE A LOT TO LEARN. DEAN GUY LONERAGAN KNEW IT TOO.

Guy Loneragan, Vet School Dean: The last first class to graduate from a school of veterinary medicine was 105 years ago. You had to make a choice. Do you choose an untested new school, or do you wait? When you chose us, you bet your dream on us. You invested your future in a vision of what could be. You invested in the belief that together with the faculty and staff we could work it out together. That you could arrive at your destination, which is today.... You are the definition of what it means to be a pioneer, to be a trailblazer and quite frankly, at that stage, we needed pioneers and trailblazers. I needed you. We needed to share this journey together, to share the joys and the arrows along the trail.

Byrd: Congratulations class of 2025. I'm so profoundly proud of each and every single one of you. It was a fun ride. Thank you so much. Now let's dare greatly because From Here, It's Possible. Thank you.

(Music)

Peters: AUSTIN'S CLASSMATES CHEER AS HE ENDS HIS SPEECH AND THEY ARE DISMISSED SHORTLY AFTER. THERE'S A FLURRY OF MOVEMENT AND ACTIVITY AS FAMILIES AND GRADUATES TEARFULLY EMBRACE AND SMILE FOR PHOTOS. LITTLE KIDS ARE HOISTED UP AND HELD BY THEIR LOVED ONES IN CAPS AND GOWNS. THE CELEBRATION IS A WORTHY ONE CONSIDERING ALL THAT WAS REQUIRED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN. AMONG THOSE RELIEVED AND CHEERFUL VOICES ARE ONES BELONGING TO ORLANDO AND MARYANA.

Orlando Vizcarra, Graduate: Orlando Vizcarra, Doctor of Veterinary Medicine.

Maryana Orduna, Graduate: I guess I'm Doctor Maryana Orduna now. This is the first time I'm using that, so I'm really excited. I can't really believe it.

Vizcarra: And I'd say it washed over like or hit me like a truck. Once I saw her, we got on stage, and I was so proud of her. It's just surreal to be in this moment, you know, like it was just a dream. It seems like just a few days ago.

Peters: THEY STARTED DATING IN 2020, AND THE FOLLOWING YEAR BECAME FIRST YEAR STUDENTS AT THE VET SCHOOL TOGETHER. THEY GOT ENGAGED RECENTLY AND REMARKABLY FOUND EMPLOYMENT AT THE SAME VET CLINIC IN SOUTH TEXAS.

EAGLE PASS HAS ONE EQUINE AND ONE SMALL ANIMAL VETERINARIAN. AND NOW, JUST LIKE THAT, THEY'VE DOUBLED THE RESOURCES FOR THE SMALL BORDER TOWN.

ORLANDO AND MARYANA SURVIVED VET SCHOOL AND THE STRENUOUS, DIFFICULT CLINICAL YEAR. BUT TO BE HERE TODAY... MARYANA SAYS IT WAS WORTH EVERY TEARFUL PHONE CALL AND EVERY LONG DRIVE TO THE NEXT CLINICAL LOCATION. IT WAS WORTH EVERY SLEEPLESS NIGHT AND EARLY MORNING- CHALLENGES SHE KNEW WERE BEING SHARED WITH 60 OF HER PEERS AND ORLANDO. IT WAS A HIGHLIGHT OF HER LIFE TO WATCH HER PERSON WALK ACROSS THAT STAGE.

Orduna: You know, I was so excited, I, I was screaming, I was hollering, I, I saw him stand there and I went, oh my gosh, where's my phone? I need to record this. So, I pulled out my phone and started recording. And I'm sure you can't hear anything because I'm screaming. But it was... I'm so proud of you for finishing this journey. And everything you've done and everything you will do. And it was I was super happy to see him walk on stage and get his hood and shake everyone's hand and be recognized for what you've done and what you've accomplished.

(Music)

Peters: GUY TELLS THIS STORY OF EARLY DAYS OF COLLECTING THIS FIRST GROUP OF STUDENTS. THE PIONEERS... AND HOW THE FACILITY WASN'T COMPLETELY FINISHED IN THE 5 MONTHS BEFORE THEY WERE SET TO OPEN... HOW THEY WALKED THROUGH THE WALLS THAT HADN'T BEEN STOOD UP YET AND SIDE-BY-SIDE CAST A VISION... CHOOSING TO SEE NOT WHAT WAS IN \*THAT\* MOMENT, BUT WHAT IT COULD BECOME FOR ALL OF THEM. TOGETHER. AND WHAT IT NOW REPRESENTS FOR THIS ENTIRE STATE.

Loneragan: I have one final charge for you. I want you to continue your ownership of this school, of our Raider Vet community. Continue to influence it going forward. It's up to you to see now and foster the potential in others, to inspire them to be just as you are today. Do this and your legacy on our school, on our community on Texas and our profession will flourish, strengthen and endure for years and decades and generations into the future.

(MUSIC ENDS AND FEARLESS MUSIC BEGINS)

Peters: FEARLESS IS PRODUCED BY TEXAS TECH MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS. IT'S HOSTED AND WRITTEN BY ME, TAYLOR PETERS. THOMAS BOYD IS OUR AUDIO ENGINEER- HE DOES SOUND DESIGN AND EDITS THIS PODCAST.

READ MORE ABOUT THE VET SCHOOL'S HISTORIC COMMENCEMENT BY CLICKING THE LINK IN OUR BIO. YOU CAN ALSO READ MORE ABOUT THE IMPACTFUL STORIES OF STUDENTS IN THIS GRADUATING CLASS.

Peters: FEARLESS IS A TEXAS TECH PRODUCTION. FROM HERE, IT'S POSSIBLE.