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Jen Maseda Speech

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Thank you. I am deeply touched by this recognition. It is an honor to be included in this first class of award recipients; they are the women that inspire me every day. I am so grateful to Javier & Sean & Millie and the Framingham State University trustees for establishing this award. We'll be celebrating local women for years to come and that is such a gift to our community and to the women that work and live here.

When Sean told me I would be receiving the award as one of the Women Making History Now, I was overwhelmed with emotion (no surprise to most of you) and said a silent prayer in gratitude.

I am a first generation natural born American and first generation college graduate. I am the daughter of a Columbian mother and an English father, talk about opposites, and not just in cultures. One a coffee plantation baroness and the other a poor farmer. They gave me the gifts of strength, perseverance, patience, and the notion that what you work for, is what you get. The one thing I lacked was great expectations beyond being a homemaker someday. Turns out homemaking is a part, a monumental part, of what I would achieve, but not the totality of my potential. I was fortunate to get a broader set of expectations from other people of influence in my life. Every experience we have, every person that steps into our path, is present in our lives to teach us something.

I've spent my 20 career on a mission of affording people the means to achieve great expectations, paying specific attention to the unique needs of women and girls. Whether it was establishing policies for our United States Coast Guard members to keep them healthy while they kept us safe, or lobbying our legislators for the formation of the MetroWest Commission on Status of Women (thank you Karen for taking that all the way) or creating programs and services that feed thousands of families with millions of pounds of food in our region, or putting hundreds of books into the hands of children who have never held a book before, my work always has a focus on eliminating issues facing women & girls.

And as I've learned, often the hard way, I can't and don't achieve anything alone. One cannot develop as a leader without strong role models and willing teachers. I have been fortunate to have more than my share. I am grateful to the United Way, it's Board of Directors and Paul Mina for having me onboard, and I am most grateful for the team I am fortunate to work with every day.

For me, my sense of purpose and direction comes from my family and friends, most especially my husband Luis and my two children Bella & Sebastian. Having a strong, compassionate and understanding support structure that challenges and encourages me, helps give me the confidence to affect change in our community and I am eternally grateful.

In receiving this honor, I took some time to reflect on the history I am impacting right NOW. Recently, we celebrated International Women's Day here on campus at the Christa McAuliffe Center with Dr. Porro, and this year's theme was Pledge for Parity. The theme risked pigeon holing the women's movement as solely a call for equality. Equality is about access to opportunity, but not a guarantee of outcomes or achievement. Take for instance racers lined up on a track. Equality would mean that everyone is on the same starting line. But with that way of thinking, the inside racer has a shorter distance to run. Equity means staggering the starters so their distance is the same; fairness and justice. Getting equal access to the starting line to the race of life is critical, you can't have equity without equality, but I believe in equitable standing earned by the unique, not equal, contributions we each make, women or men. The difference between equality and equity is extremely important to our work and the future direction of our women's movement.

I believe that the time is past, when a women's movement had to exclude men in the fight 'against' patriarchy. The time has come rather for women's visions to restructure and redefine work in order to fashion a new world for women and men based on a women's experience and skills as a person, a care-giver, a unique stakeholder, and professional peer.

I don't want to be treated equally to a man, I want to be treated like a dedicated, effective leader, that works for equal access and the fairness and justice of equity for all.

Thank you for this honor. I will remember it always.