CAL Alumnus and Author Richard Ford Speaks at MSU Spring Commencement

The College of Arts and Letters was well represented on the speakers’ podium at the undergraduate and graduate commencements of MSU’s 2013 Spring Convocation for graduating seniors held Friday, May 3, at the Jack Breslin Student Events Center.

The advanced degree commencement ceremony featured College of Arts and Letters alumnus and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Richard Ford. And College of Arts and Letters graduating senior and new alumna Allegra Smith was the undergraduate commencement speaker representing the Class of 2013 graduating seniors. (See article page 151.) The undergraduate ceremony also featured East Lansing native and Emmy Award-winning actor Timothy Busfield.

“We’re an institution that treasures the arts and culture, so it’s exciting to know they’ll take center stage at this year’s commencement ceremonies,” MSU President Lou Anna K. Simon said. “Tim Busfield and Richard Ford have made some memorable contributions to the arts, and I’m sure their passion and dedication will inspire our graduates—who are stepping out now onto their own life stage.”

Ford received an honorary doctorate of fine arts, and Busfield received an honorary doctorate of humanities.

Following the advanced degree commencement, Richard Ford spoke to and answered questions from an energized and enthused group of students, faculty and alums in the Presentation Space in the new Wells Hall addition. The session was followed by a meet-and-greet reception with Mr. Ford and his wife, Kristina, in the Wells Hall Communication Space atrium.

RICHARD FORD

Richard Ford is a 1966 MSU College of Arts and Letters alumnus with a bachelor’s degree in English. He was born in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1944, and is married to Kristina Ford, an urban planner and MSU alumna. The Fords met while students at MSU.

MSU President Lou Anna K. Simon, CAL alum and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Richard Ford, and College of Arts and Letters Dean Karin A. Wurst got together following the university’s advanced degree commencement ceremony.

Ford is the author of 10 works of fiction, among them “The Sportswriter,” “Independence Day,” and most recently, New York Times’ 2012 best-seller “Canada.” Ford has also written several stories and essays that have been published in The New Yorker and The New York Times.

A member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Mr. Ford has earned a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, The PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction and the Chicago Tribune Heartland Prize. He is the Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University in New York City, where Kristina Ford also teaches.

TIMOTHY BUSFIELD

Busfield, an East Lansing native, is an Emmy Award-winning actor with strong ties to MSU. His father taught theatre at MSU and his mother was director of MSU Press. After graduating from East Lansing High School, Busfield launched his acting career in theatre, working with Academy Award winners Chris Cooper and Kathy Bates. To date, he has appeared in more than 70 plays.

Busfield is best known for his role as Elliot Weston on the television series, “Thirtysomething,” and his recurring role as Danny Concannon in the series “The West Wing.” Busfield has starred in 20 films, including blockbuster hits, “Field of Dreams” and “Revenge of the Nerds,” and has earned more than 425 acting credits, appearing as a regular or recurring character in 13 shows. He and actress Melissa Gilbert married in April 2013.

Above: CAL Dean Karin A. Wurst and Emmy Award-winning actor Timothy Busfield following the MSU undergraduate ceremony.