CHICAGO, May 15, 2013 – Society of Women Engineers Executive Director and CEO Betty Shanahan received an honorary doctorate degree from the University of Connecticut this weekend before addressing the School of Engineering at its commencement ceremony.

“As you begin your careers, I hope my remarks bring you confidence in your talents and a motivation to drive innovation through diversity and inclusion,” Shanahan told almost 500 graduates and their enthusiastic families and friends gathered at Gampel Pavilion on May 11. “Your generation is recognized as being more inclusive than the predecessors – bring that value to your careers. The 21st century belongs to you. Drive that innovation.”

Shanahan and delivered a message of the importance of engineers in solving the challenges of the 21st century in her address, emphasizing the value of diversity in the workplace as a driving force for the innovation and creativity necessary to address those challenges. Prior to joining SWE in 2002, Shanahan worked for 24 years in development, engineering management and marketing for the electronics and software industries. Her inspirational message drew upon research and her personal experience as a woman in a male-dominated field.

“Ultimately, a diverse team outperforms a homogenous team in productivity and creativity,” Shanahan said. “Those with a different identity than the majority – such as gender, race and ethnicity, GLBT, disabilities, generation, socio-economic background – will bring unique approaches and perspectives. Those with different training, interests and areas of expertise will identify new opportunities.”

Shanahan delivered the address shortly after receiving an honorary Doctor of Science degree from the University of Connecticut. The University awards honorary degrees "only in recognition of extraordinary and lasting distinction. The award should represent the highest intellectual and moral values; it should reflect the very character and quality of the University itself."

Shanahan previously earned a B.S. in electrical engineering from Michigan State University, a Master of Software Engineering from the Wang Institute of Graduate Studies and an MBA from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business.
Interim Dean of UConn’s School of Engineering, Dr. Kazem Kazerounian, said, “Betty Shanahan is an exceptional engineer, leader and role model whose contributions to engineering education and our profession have been nothing short of momentous. She has championed programs that encourage young women and members of other underrepresented cohorts to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics. She has developed the infrastructure to support and retain young women as they pursue their degrees and helped to forge a STEM ecosystem that recognizes, encourages and rewards a more diverse community as a means to invigorating and perpetuating the nation’s economic progress. Simply put, she is a lightning rod who is helping to transform the engineering landscape to enrich and sustain the future. It was our great privilege to host Betty as our commencement speaker and to present her an Honorary Degree from the University of Connecticut.”

About SWE
The Society of Women Engineers (SWE), founded in 1950, is a not-for-profit educational and service organization. SWE is the driving force that establishes engineering as a highly desirable career aspiration for women. SWE empowers women to succeed and advance in those aspirations and receive the recognition and credit for their life-changing contributions and achievements as engineers and leaders. For more information about the Society please visit www.swe.org or call (312) 596-5223.

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