

Triumphant Trek back to Georgia Tech!

A chilly but sunny Wednesday brought 39 Carson Scholars and their families back to Georgia Tech along with 48 new scholars! Ranking among the top 10 public universities in the US, Georgia Tech is situated in Atlanta. The school's hotel and conference center was bursting at the seams with congratulants in the form of educators, sponsors, and general supporters. The ballroom was elegant with coffered ceilings, where the recesses were bordered in a sea-worthy cobalt blue, framed the beautiful boat-shaped lighting fixtures unique to this venue, signifying life journeys which might have a few waves, but with sea-worthy vessels would triumph! Jean Ross of WAOK Newstalk radio returned to emcee the program. Along with her warm welcome she commented on how the demographics of the scholars at this banquet had expanded to include high academic achievers from not only Georgia and Tennessee, but from Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and both the Carolinas as well!

Although none of the students were wearing a laurel wreath of victory, when they marched through the twin double doors of the ballroom as the majestic music played, they were backlit by natural light from the 10' tall windows, encasing each scholar hero in a laurel wreath of light for victory over academic challenges! Of course the entire procession was accompanied by thunderous applause!!

One of L. O. Kimberly Elementary School's finest, 2014 Carson Scholar awardee, future scientist and 5th-grader Cortez Jolly led the Pledge of Allegiance in a firm, resonant, and unhaltingly clear voice in his charcoal grey tailored suit!

Mrs. Candy Carson followed with a welcome to all, and expressed her appreciation on behalf of the organization to the educators and school administrators, who came out on a school night to celebrate the accomplishments of these special future leaders, and to the great partners who worked with the organization to help make the event possible, including the Marcus Foundation, the Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga, the Mountain Education Foundation and the Sellaway Christian Fund. She also thanked the dedicated volunteers who helped - Frank Casagrande and family members, Karis and Anthony, as well as Larry Jennings who has volunteered for the 3rd time. A special thanks was given for the three staff members who made the trek all the way from Baltimore to make it all happen: Reading Room Coordinator Tammy Blazenyak, Development Director Mary Wright, and Expansion Coordinator Sheila Butler.

Reid Mitchell, another 2014 Carson Scholar and a 9th grader at Signal Mountain High School enjoys composing music and developing new concepts and ideas. This future engineer gave a stirring blessing on the occasion and the meal, thanking the "One Above" for helping students to not only achieve their goals, but also enabling them to help others as they reach for their dreams.

While dinner was served, attendees were asked to view the 12' screens where all of the Atlanta-Chattanooga scholars were featured.

After dinner, Jean Ross returned to the stage to continue with the program by introducing the featured alumni speaker, Emma Poe-Yamagata, a two-time Carson Scholar winner, who obtained her basic education in Maryland. Emma currently attends Georgia Tech as a biomedical engineering major with a minor in materials science engineering and serves her Atlanta community in various endeavors including working globally to design and implement solutions for health and infrastructure needs in developing communities around the world.

Addressing the unique honor, privilege, and experience of a Carson Scholar, she encouraged her newest compatriots in high academic achievement to recognize the promise that has been identified in them and to believe that in the not very distant future, it will no longer be a potential but an actual reality.

Mariah Smith, 2014 scholar and 8th-grader who serves as TV spokesperson for Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School in Slidell, Louisiana came next. This young lady thinks globally, as she fundraises for the education of young children in Haiti. And as an aspiring neurosurgeon, she seemed to be the best choice to introduce world renowned neurosurgeon, Dr. Ben Carson.

Mariah's introduction on non-coincidences started with her first encounter with Dr. Carson at nine months old. Her family was in the audience at her cousin's graduation from Xavier University in the year 2000, where Carson was the commencement speaker. Her father purchased Dr. Carson's autobiography Gifted Hands that very day. Years later, her mother's experience with a brain tumor sparked Mariah's interest in the same career as Dr. Carson, neurology. And now here she is as a Carson Scholar! As she continued with highlights of Dr. Carson's honors, she announced her prayer that each of the scholars would demonstrate their appreciation for their Carson Scholar recognition by always giving back!

After congratulating the students on receiving this highly competitive award, Dr. Carson compared his life as a poor student in elementary school with some students and adults he has encountered within the last few years. He cited this lack of knowledge as a big problem in the United States, since our founding fathers stated that our government is based on having a well-informed populace and that the nature of our country would change rapidly if we were not well-informed and educated. Historically this has occurred over and over with countries' cultures quickly disintegrating. Therefore it is important for all of us to develop ourselves academically. Also, there are forces in our society who would have our people believe we are victims who cannot achieve on their own. However, he continued, "You scholars will be those who think for themselves and don't listen to naysayers. What is needed in our country and the future is leadership – not only smart people, but those who care about others, who come up with things that actually work, and

who understand the importance of being fair to everyone.” He ended his talk with THINK BIG, the Carson Scholars motto.

Next, in celebration of their accomplishments, each scholar’s name was called by Ms. Ross, and after ascending the platform, scholars received their certificate with a hug from Candy Carson after Dr. Carson placed their well-deserved medal around their necks. The Impossible Dream, the signature song of Carson Scholars played at the end as the scholars waved their glowsticks in a symbolic gesture of “letting their lights shine.”

Thank you again to all the supporters, volunteers, family members, educators and enthusiasts who helped to make this celebration of our future leaders a reality!