

[<<Back](#)

News Release: October 3, 2004

## Scholarship Convocation Speaker Challenges Scholars to Serve the Greater Good

TUSKEGEE UNIVERSITY, AL — (October 3, 2004) — Nobel Prize winner Dr. Richard E. Smalley's address of Tuskegee University's 79th Annual Scholarship Convocation/Parents' Recognition Program was the culmination of a fine weekend honoring parents and scholars and networking with prospective students.

Tuskegee University's historic campus saw hundreds of participants in the Oct. 1-3 Parents' Weekend event honoring those who faithfully support and nurture Tuskegee's students, and hundreds more participated in the annual Fall Open House Oct. 2 encouraging others to join the Tuskegee family.

Many who remained on campus from these events gathered with a capacity crowd in the Tuskegee University Chapel to hear Smalley's challenge to this generation of Tuskegees and to watch as Tuskegee honored the academic success of its students and recognized the Parent of the Year, Selma attorney Carolyn Gaines-Varner.

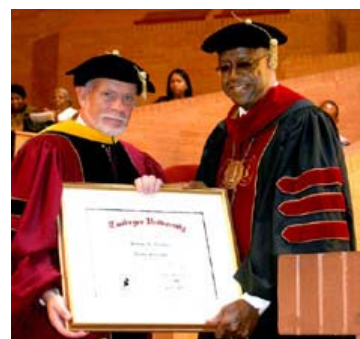
The challenge Smalley posed to today's generation — which now lives in a world of 6.5 billion people that could grow to more than 10 billion during their lifetime — wasn't an easy one.

"Why are we here," asked the director of Rice University's Carbon Nanotechnology Laboratory. "Your single greatest challenge is to provide the technology and wealth that will enable the well-being of all of God's children, 10 billion people. Only about 1.5 billion live well today." The bottom percent of Earth's population "lives horrendously. Billions of people really are not involved in modern life."

Smalley strongly recommended the audience read Daniel Yergin's book, *The Prize - The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power*, winner of the 1992 Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction.

"Read it and remember how it was when we were rich in oil, when the biggest single problem was that it was too cheap. Subsequent years from now there will be less oil. How then will we enable the well-being of the world with that number of people on the planet?" Smalley asked.

The 1996 Nobel laureate in chemistry — who also discussed the longer lifespans of humans as cures and treatments are found for bacterial infections and diseases — urged the listeners to take seriously their role as the higher species on this planet. Smalley mentioned the ideas of evolution versus creationism, Darwin versus the Bible's "Genesis." The burden of proof, he said, is on those who don't believe that "'Genesis' was right, and there was a creation, and that Creator is still involved.



Tuskegee University's President, Dr. Benjamin F. Payton, presents Dr. Smalley with a plaque for his service to humanity as a distinguished scientist. Smalley is a Rice University professor.



79th Annual Scholarship Convocation/Parents' Recognition Program speaker Richard Smalley receives the honorary doctor of science degree from Tuskegee.



Each of Tuskegee's five colleges recognized top-ranking, exemplary students for the University Scholar honor.



Tuskegee University's 2004 Eminent

"We are the only species that can destroy the Earth or take care of it and nurture all that live on this very special planet," Smalley continued. "I'm urging you to look on these things. For whatever reason, this planet was built specifically for us. Working on this planet is an absolute moral code. ... Let's go out and do what we were put on Earth to do."

Tuskegee University's President, Dr. Benjamin F. Payton, said the honorary doctor of science degree was conferred upon Dr. Smalley for his work "as a scientist, professor, researcher and teacher. ... You are recognized around the world for your distinguished achievements in science." Payton also said the honor places Smalley among other outstanding national figures who have addressed Tuskegee.

Peter Spears, dean of students and chair of the Parents' Weekend Committee, presented Tuskegee Parent of the Year Gaines-Varner.

The widowed attorney has four children attending college, three at Tuskegee University. She is a member of First Baptist Church in Selma and works hard to "serve as a model of success for people who value education." Spears said. "It is a great honor for Tuskegee University to recognize you as the 2004 parent of the year."

"It is indeed an honor to be named Tuskegee's Parent of the Year," Gaines-Varner said. "My husband was a 1973 summa cum laude graduate of Tuskegee. He would have been extremely proud that I've received this."

"Being a successful parent," she added, "is determined by your support base. It is difficult to raise and support my children without help, and several people I know and don't know at Tuskegee have been there for me and my children. Thank you."

Payton said it is important to not only show appreciation for the parents of Tuskegee students, but to also hold up Tuskegee's student scholars as "models of excellence." That is why the Parents' Recognition Program and Scholarship Convocation were combined. It's an opportunity, he said, to "say congratulations to them all."

Phyllis Tigner of LaGrange, Ga., was happy to see her twin daughter, 21-year-old Julaunica, standing among those with 4.0 grade point averages. The Eminent Scholar said the honor has been her goal since she attended past Scholarship Convocations. "This means a lot to me," said the junior chemical engineering major whose sister, Julia, is also a Tuskegeean.

Kennethia Owens, also 21, graduates in May with a double major in accounting and finance. A senior from Bessemer, Owens said it's important to "understand time management" to earn Eminent Scholar status. "My parents taught me that education is your vessel for success in this world."

That's about right, agreed her father Kenneth Owens. Tuskegee for his daughter has meant "an opportunity to be successful. It really does take a village to raise a child. It takes a lot of people's support — some family, some not."

Owens' mother, Dorothy Pippen, says her daughter "has always done well. She graduated No. 1 in her class in Bessemer and hasn't had a 'B' since third-grade. She has done super with her dad and my support. We're very proud of her."

Eminent Scholars and sophomores Travis and Troy Nunnally were proud of each other. The 19-year-old twins of Atlanta worked hard for their 4.0s.

Scholars pose for a group photograph. The scholars have a 4.0 grade point average.



Tuskegee President Benjamin F. Payton presents a plaque to Parent of the Year Carolyn Gaines-Varner, a Selma attorney.

Troy, an electrical engineering major, said there was an "unspoken competition. I'd ask, 'What grade did you get?' If I got a higher grade, I'd say, 'Yes!'"

Travis, a mechanical engineering major, said, "It's always nice to have somebody here to uplift you and to help catch you before you fall. It's great support and a great advantage."

One day the two hope to own an engineering firm. Until then, the competition at Tuskegee quietly continues.

"Tuskegee is a really nurturing environment," Travis said. "We had opportunities to attend (other universities), but we came here because the environment appealed to us more than anything else."

Greats have walked Tuskegee's grounds, and future greats are being molded here, said Alpha Kappa Mu Honor Society President Kristian D. Holmes. "This is a time for courage ... the courage to dream, to act out and to risk. I strongly encourage you to set goals and to not allow anyone to stand in your way."

The Eminent Scholars honored for 4.0 GPAs were Solitaire J. Andrews, aerospace engineering, Uriah, Ala.; Sharon M. Bush, biology, Eight Mile, Ala.; Tamesha L. Carter, medical technology, Sylacauga, Ala.; Eboni M. Ellis, biology, Lake City, Fla.; Tara L. Grinnage-Pulley, animal and poultry science, Arnold, Md.; Daveta A. Gross, elementary education, Hattiesburg, Miss.; Dalya M. Lateef, biology, Phoenix, Ariz.; Courtney L. Lockhart, biology, Auburn; Sharon Melton, mechanical engineering, Atlanta, Ga.; David H. Milledge, political science, Montgomery, Ala.; Montavius D. Mitchell, finance, Woodland, Ga.; Andre P. Moore, management science, Trinidad & Tobago; Travis J. Nunnally, mechanical engineering, Atlanta, Ga.; Troy J. Nunnally, electrical engineering, Atlanta, Ga.; Kennethia F. Owens, accounting and finance, Bessemer, Ala.; Allyson N. Ross, chemical engineering, Harvey, La.; Jerlinda G. Ross, biology, Warner Robins, Ga.; Rachael H. Stone, aerospace engineering, Seale, Ala.; and Julaunica A. Tigner, chemical engineering, LaGrange, Ga..

The University Scholars honored as top ranking, exemplary students in their colleges were Tara L. Grinnage-Pulley of the College of Agricultural, Environmental and Natural Sciences, animal and poultry science, Arnold, Md.; Montavius Mitchell of the College of Business and Information Science, finance, Woodland, Ga.; Sherman T. Pelt of the College of Engineering, Architecture and Physical Sciences, electrical engineering, Riverdale, Ga.; Jennifer K. Faulkner of the College of Liberal Arts and Education, psychology, Wyncote, Pa.; and Sonia Cajigas of the College of Veterinary Medicine, Nursing and Allied Health, veterinary medicine, Aguado, Puerto Rico.

Send questions and comments about this site to [webmaster@tuskegee.edu](mailto:webmaster@tuskegee.edu).  
All content © Copyright 2003 - 2006 Tuskegee University and WorldNow. All Rights Reserved.  
For more information on this site, please read our [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#).