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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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GEORGIA PERIMETER COLLEGE

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

MAY 15, 2009

**REMARKS:**

TO THE BOARD OF REGENTS...PRESIDENT TRICOLI...MEMBERS OF THE FACULTY AND STAFF OF GEORGIA PERIMETER COLLEGE...STUDENTS, FAMILY MEMBERS, FRIENDS...TO ALL DISTINGUISHED GUESTS...IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO BE WITH YOU ON THE OCCASION OF YOUR 44TH ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT.

TO THE GEORGIA PERIMETER COLLEGE CLASS OF 2009 –  
**CONGRATULATIONS.**

YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS, FRIENDS AND GUESTS IN ATTENDANCE SHARE IN AND DESERVE CONGRATULATIONS ON THIS DAY, AS WELL, FOR PUSHING YOU...BELIEVING IN YOU...AND SUPPORTING YOU.

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO RESIDE IN DEKALB COUNTY...I AM PROUD TO SERVE AS **YOUR** CEO.

CERTAINLY, THE FIRST FIVE MONTHS OF MY TENURE HAVE BEEN A NEW, EXCITING, AND INTERESTING JOURNEY...SIMILAR I HOPE...TO THE NEW JOURNEYS YOU'LL TAKE AS GRADUATES WHO MUST FORGE YOUR WAY AND MAKE YOUR MARK IN THE WORLD.

AS MUCH EXCITEMENT AND, AND PERHAPS ANXIETY AS YOU MAY HOLD FOR THIS DAY, I AM SURE YOU ARE ALSO EXCITED ABOUT THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT LIE AHEAD.

TODAY, YOU START YET ANOTHER PHASE OF LIFE'S JOURNEY.

TODAY, YOU TAKE BOLD NEW STEPS TOWARD BECOMING EXACTLY WHO YOU WANT TO BE.

YET...BEFORE YOU GO FORTH...IT IS BEFITTING THAT WE PAUSE TO SALUTE YOU AND CELEBRATE YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THIS MOMENT.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE **RELISH** THIS TIME, **THIS** MOMENT AND **THIS** PLACE BECAUSE, ONCE YOU LEAVE, YOU WILL VENTURE OUT AND CREATE A **NEW** PATH – ONE THAT WILL BE DIFFERENT FROM YOUR TWO YEARS HERE AT GEORGIA PERIMETER COLLEGE.

IT SHOULD COMFORT YOU TO KNOW THAT YOU ARE WELL PREPARED AND READY TO RECEIVE YOUR DEGREE FROM ONE OF OUR NATION'S BEST AND FASTEST GROWING TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS AND...CERTAINLY...A SHINING STAR IN DEKALB COUNTY.

I HAVE HAD MANY CONVERSATIONS WITH DR. TRICOLI, AND KNOW THAT HIS VISION FOR THIS INSTITUTION EXTENDS BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF ITS CAMPUSES.

EVEN IF I WAS NOT INVOLVED IN COUNTY GOVERNMENT...IT WOULD BE HARD TO MISS THE IMMENSE IMPACT GEORGIA PERIMETER COLLEGE HAS HAD...NOT ONLY ON DEKALB COUNTY...BUT ON THE ENTIRE STATE OF GEORGIA.

I AM AWARE THAT OUR COUNTY PUBLIC SAFETY DEPARTMENTS CONSISTENTLY HIRE GEORGIA PERIMETER COLLEGE GRADUATES...AND GEORGIA PERIMETER COLLEGE NURSING GRADUATES ARE HELPING TO FILL CRITICAL SHORTAGES.

DENTAL HYGIENE ALUMNI ARE FINDING THEIR PLACE IN THE WORKFORCE, AS WELL...AND I WAS IMPRESSED TO HEAR THAT 100% OF THIS YEAR'S DENTAL HYGIENE GRADUATING CLASS PASSED THEIR NATIONAL BOARD EXAMS...SCORING WELL ABOVE THE NATIONAL AVERAGE. CONGRATULATIONS...GREAT JOB!

WHEN IT COMES TO COMMUNITY AND CULTURE, GEORGIA PERIMETER COLLEGE IS A HUB FOR THE DEKALB SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA AND THEATRE ARTS GUILD, WHICH HAVE PROVIDED QUALITY PRODUCTIONS IN THE COLLEGE'S THEATERS SINCE 1969.

AND...HOW MANY TWO-YEAR COLLEGES ACTUALLY OFFER THEIR STUDENTS AN OPPORTUNITY TO STUDY IN EGYPT OR COSTA RICA?

WITH ALL THAT IS GOING ON AT GPC, IT IS NO WONDER YOU ARE BEAMING TODAY.

LIKE YOU, I RECALL GRADUATING FROM COLLEGE AND ANTICIPATING MY NEXT STEPS.

I KNEW I WOULD NEED EVEN **MORE** PREPARATION TO ACHIEVE MY DREAM OF BECOMING AN ATTORNEY AND OF MAYBE, ONE DAY, ENTERING PUBLIC SERVICE.

IT WAS EXCITING **AND** FRIGHTENING ALL AT ONCE.

TO COPE, I DEVELOPED A “KEEP IT MOVING” ATTITUDE BECAUSE I UNDERSTOOD, IN ORDER TO ATTAIN MY GOALS, I NEEDED TO KEEP MOVING FORWARD.

I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU A FEW OF THE FUNDAMENTALS, OR CORE VALUES, THAT KEEP ME MOVING—EVEN NOW.

THEY ARE **PERSISTENCE**, **COLLABORATION** AND **SELFLESS SERVICE**.

### **PERSISTENCE**

THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A MORE IMPERATIVE TIME TO BE PERSISTENT.

WE ARE COMPETING ON A GLOBAL STAGE, AND THE WORLD IS BOTH OUR CHALLENGE AND OUR OPPORTUNITY.

BASED ON WHAT I HAVE SEEN AND HEARD ABOUT GEORGIA PERIMETER COLLEGE GRADUATES, YOU ARE WELL PREPARED.

EVEN SO...PERSISTENCE WILL SEPARATE YOU FROM THE PACK, AND REWARD YOU GREAT DIVIDENDS. NO MATTER HOW WELL PREPARED ONE MIGHT BE, THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR PERSISTENCE.

AS CEO OF DEKALB COUNTY...I MAKE BEING PERSISTENT A PRIORITY EVERYDAY TO OBTAIN THE RESOURCES OUR COUNTY NEEDS TO REMAIN A COMPETITIVE, VIABLE OPTION FOR PEOPLE WHO WANT TO WORK, PLAY OR LIVE HERE.

PERSISTENCE HAS PLACED ME AT THE TABLE WITH THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION TO MAKE SURE THAT NOT ONLY DEKALB COUNTY...BUT ALSO COUNTY GOVERNMENTS ACROSS THE UNITED STATES, GET THE RESOURCES THEY DESERVE.

BY BEING PERSISTENT...YOU CAN OPEN DOORS TO ENRICH YOURSELF...AND HELP OTHERS ALONG THE WAY.

YOU CAN RISE TO THE TOP WITHOUT HAVING TO RESORT TO STEPPING ON OTHERS ALONG THE WAY. YOU CAN GO AS FAR AS YOU CHOOSE.

PERSISTENCE, PAVED THE WAY FOR HAMILTON CUNNINGHAM...A RECENT AND SUCCESSFUL GEORGIA PERIMETER COLLEGE ALUM AND STONE MOUNTAIN NATIVE...WHO IS NOW ATTENDING HOWARD UNIVERSITY IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

IT WAS ANNOUNCED JUST THE OTHER DAY THAT HAMILTON IS ONE OF ONLY 60 STUDENTS IN THE COUNTRY TO WIN THE PRESTIGIOUS 2009 TRUMAN AWARD, WORTH \$30,000.

THE TRUMAN AWARD IS A SCHOLARSHIP AWARDED TO STUDENTS WHO HAVE EXCELLED ACADEMICALLY AND WHO ARE COMMITTED TO CAREERS IN PUBLIC SERVICE.

HAMILTON IS NO STRANGER TO ACHIEVEMENT.

HE TOO, WON A JACK KENT COOKE SCHOLARSHIP, WHICH ALLOWED HIM TO ATTEND HOWARD UNIVERSITY.

I IMAGINE THAT HAMILTON COULD TELL US A LOT ABOUT PERSISTENCE AND THE IMPORTANT ROLE IT HAS PLAYED IN HELPING HIM TO REACH HIS GOALS.

SO...WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED BESIDES PERSISTENCE?

YOU WILL NEED **COLLABORATION AND THE ABILITY TO WORK WITH WELL WITH OTHERS.**

LIFE IS NOT AN INDIVIDUAL SPORT.

IN ORDER TO SUCCEED, YOU WILL NEED TO WORK WELL WITH OTHERS ALONG THE WAY.

JUST THINK OF YOUR CLASSES HERE AT GEORGIA PERIMETER COLLEGE.

YOU HAD GROUP PROJECTS IN ADDITION TO YOUR INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENTS.

YOUR CLASSES...AND CLASSES AT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY...ARE STRUCTURED THAT WAY TO EQUIP YOU WITH THE TOOLS YOU WILL NEED IN YOUR CAREER...AND IN YOUR PERSONAL LIFE.

LET'S LOOK AT ONE OF MY FAVORITE EXAMPLES – SPORTS.

IN BASKETBALL...YOU HAVE A CORE TEAM MADE UP OF FIVE PLAYERS.

YOU MAY HAVE ONE STAR OR A COUPLE OF STAR PLAYERS...BUT THAT STAR PLAYER ALONE CANNOT WIN THE GAME WITHOUT THE TEAM.

RECENTLY...WHEN LABRON JAMES ACCEPTED THE MVP AWARD...HE ATTRIBUTED HIS SUCCESS TO HIS HIGH SCHOOL AND NBA TEAMMATES.

AS GREAT AS “KING JAMES” IS IN BASKETBALL...HE RECOGNIZED HIS TEAM MATES EFFORTS IN HELPING HIM TO ACHIEVE HIS GOALS.

THE BOTTOM LINE IS – WE ALL NEED SOMEONE TO ASSIST US IN OUR GOALS.

WHETHER IT IS ON THE SIDELINE OR BEHIND THE SCENES, SOMEONE HAS ASSISTED YOU...WHICH IS WHY WE ARE ABLE TO HONOR YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS TODAY.

COLLABORATION IS ESSENTIAL IN BUILDING COALITIONS AND GETTING THINGS DONE.

IT ALSO BUILDS TRUST.

WHEN I STARTED MY FIRST JOB OUT OF LAW SCHOOL, I LEARNED QUICKLY THAT THE BEST WAY TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN BUSINESS IS THROUGH A TEAM APPROACH.

COLLABORATION AND ESTABLISHING TRUST IN THE COMMUNITY IS ONE OF THE REASONS WHY GPC HAS BEEN SO SUCCESSFUL IN BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS...SO THAT YOU WILL HAVE A SEAMLESS OPPORTUNITY TO TRANSFER.

THE GPC TAG PROGRAM IS A WONDERFUL EXAMPLE OF THIS COLLABORATION.

I WAS ALSO PLEASED TO HEAR DR. TRICOLI DISCUSSING THE NEW DIRECTION THE COLLEGE IS TAKING IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT.

THE RESULT OF THIS COLLABORATIVE EFFORT IS THAT OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS ARE MET WHILE YOU GET AN OPPORTUNITY TO PUT INTO PRACTICE YOUR CLASSROOM LEARNING. YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ALLOWS YOU TO GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY THAT HAS SUPPORTED YOU DURING THIS JOURNEY.

AS YOU TRAVEL THE PATH LIFE HAS FOR YOU...YOU WILL HAVE PLENTY OF OPPORTUNITIES TO SIT AT THE TABLE AS A COLLABORATOR.

I ENCOURAGE YOU TO TAKE YOUR SEAT BECAUSE YOUR VOICE MATTERS.

AND, REMEMBER, COLLABORATION DOES NOT ALWAYS COME EASILY.

CONSENSUS BUILDING...I HAVE LEARNED TAKES SUSTAINED FOCUS **AND** DIPLOMACY, AMONG OTHER ATTRIBUTES.

EVERYONE WILL NOT ALWAYS AGREE, BUT BEING TOLERANT OF DIFFERENT THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS WILL HELP YOU REACH YOUR ULTIMATE GOAL...WHICH WILL BE BENEFICIAL FOR ALL.

PRESIDENT OBAMA HAS TAUGHT US THE BEST LESSON ABOUT COLLABORATION.

IT IS THE REASON HE WAS SUCCESSFUL IN HIS PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN  
AND THE REASON HE HAS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED HIS FIRST 100  
DAYS IN OFFICE.

SOME HAVE CHARACTERIZED YOUNGER GENERATIONS AS SELFISH AND  
NARROW-MINDED.

I REJECT THAT ASSESSMENT BECAUSE I TRULY BELIEVE YOU ARE OUR  
FUTURE.

I HAVE FOUR-YEAR-OLD TWINS...AND I REFUSE TO ACCEPT THAT DISMAL  
OUTLOOK FOR THEIR FUTURE.

YES...THERE ARE SOME WHO ARE SELFISH AND NARROW – MINDED, BUT  
THAT DOES NOT CHARACTERIZE NOR DOES IT DESCRIBE ALL...IT SHOULD  
NOT DESCRIBE YOU.

PEOPLE WILL CONSTANTLY TRY TO PUT YOU IN BOXES.

THEY ARE BOXES WITH NARROW WALLS WITH NO SOURCE OF LIGHT OR  
PROMISE.

BUT...YOU ARE NOT CONFINED TO THEIR OPINIONS OF YOU.

IT HAS TAKEN MORE THAN A “SELFISH AND NARROW – MINDED PERSON”  
TO ARRIVE AT THIS DESTINATION...THE PLACE WHERE YOU FIND  
YOURSELVES TODAY.

YOU HAVE MADE BOLD DECISIONS AND YOU HAVE MANY MORE CHOICES  
TO MAKE AS YOU COMMENCE THE NEW CHAPTER OF YOUR LIFE TODAY.

AND I SEE GEORGIA PERIMETER COLLEGE GRADUATES WHO ARE WILLING  
TO PROVIDE SELFLESS SERVICE TO OUR COMMUNITIES.

YOU HAVE JUST HEARD DR. TRICOLI SHARE SOME OF YOUR FELLOW  
GRADUATE’S STORIES OF SELFLESS SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY...AND I  
AM SURE THAT MANY OF YOU HAVE YOUR OWN SELFLESS ACCOUNTS TO  
TELL.

SELFLESS MEANS ALWAYS WILLING TO APPROPRIATELY SHARE  
CREDIT...AND OFTEN TIMES GIVE CREDIT, TO THOSE WHO HELPED YOU IN  
REACHING YOUR GOAL.

AS YOU LEAVE THIS COLLEGE...ONE THAT HAS PROVIDED YOU WITH A FIRM FOUNDATION...I ENCOURAGE YOU TO USE WHAT YOU HAVE GAINED HERE AS A COMPASS TO GUIDE YOUR **PERSONAL** GIFT OF SERVICE.

**YOU SHOULD NEVER** FORGET WHERE YOU BEGAN...OR THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED YOU ALONG THE WAY.

**TODAY**...WE CELEBRATE YOUR ACADEMIC SUCCESS.

AND...NOT ONLY THAT...BUT ALSO YOUR **PERSISTENCE**, YOUR **COLLABORATIVE SPIRIT** AND YOUR **WILLINGNESS TO SERVE OTHERS**.

TOGETHER...THESE THREE CHARACTER TRAITS WILL SUSTAIN YOU FOR A LIFETIME.

GRADUATES...I AM HAPPY TO BE IN YOUR COMPANY.

AND IF I CAN...I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A PERSONAL REQUEST...THAT YOU CONSIDER MAKING DEKALB COUNTY A PLACE WHERE YOU CONTINUE TO LIVE...WORK...AND BECOME AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY.

MEANWHILE...I WISH FOR YOU A LIFE LIVED SO FULLY THAT...THE  
WORLD BECOMES A BETTER PLACE FOR YOUR BEING IN IT.

I WISH EACH OF YOU GOD'S SPEED AND MUCH SUCCESS.

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