

Elks Scholars Honored in “Salute to Excellence”

Staff Report

“Overwhelming” is how one student achiever described the assemblage of talent and accomplishment of the adult honorees at the 30th “Salute to Excellence” weekend of the American Academy of Achievement.

New York City was the site of the event and its Banquet of the Golden Plate on June 29. Numerous adults from many fields, who have experienced outstanding success, were brought together to share their thoughts on achievement with 450 young people from around the country.

Among the exemplary student participants in the three-day-long schedule of symposiums and social activities were the top six scholarship recipients of the Elks National Foundation for 1991. They and their colleagues had been selected to participate in this year’s academy salute because they represent the brightest and best examples of scholastic and extracurricular attainment by high-school seniors in America.

Setting the tone and the pace for the head-spinning activity were the opening tour, reception, dinner and symposium at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on Thursday evening. A tour of the extensive and magnificent Annenberg Collection was followed by a banquet amid Egyptian antiquities.

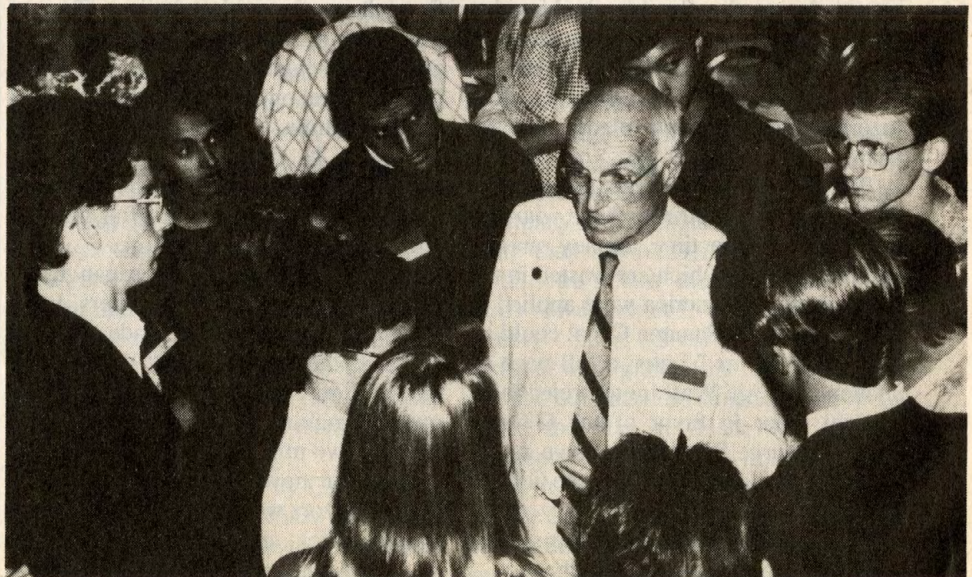
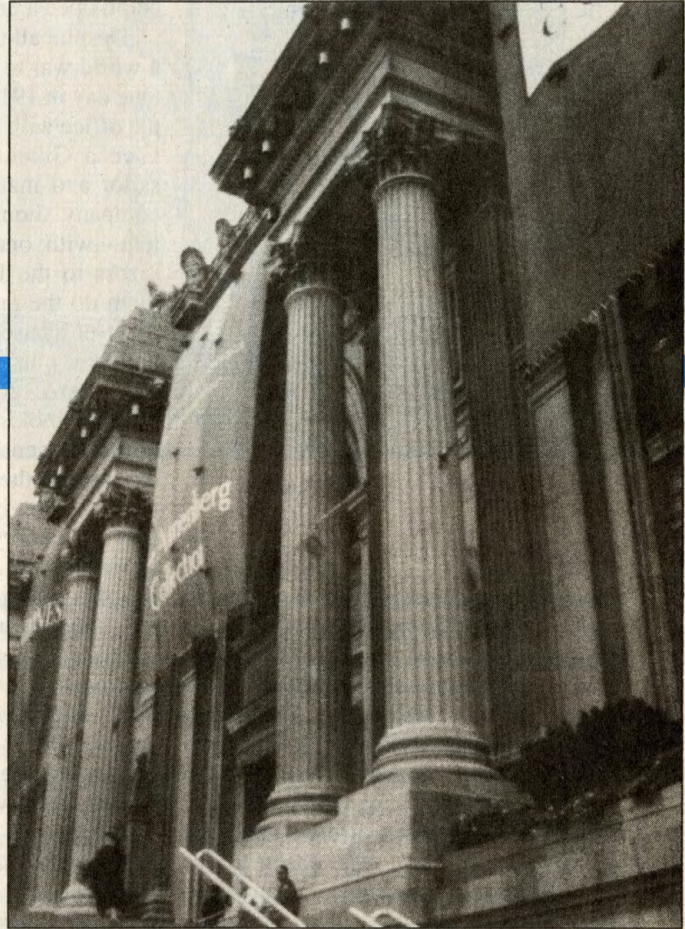
Welcomed by Host Chairman Henry Kravis, Senior Partner of Kohlberg Kravis Roberts and Company, the participants were introduced to the first of the 1991 adult honorees of the Academy,



Javier Perez de Cuellar, Secretary-General of the United Nations, told the young leaders they are the hope of the future to address the world’s challenges.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art provided an elegant setting for the opening of this year’s “Salute to Excellence.”

Student leaders were able to speak with 1990 Nobel Prize winner Dr. Joseph Murray about his pioneering work in human organ transplants.





Dr. Sylvia Earle, world-renowned marine scientist who is head of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, shared her concern for the environment with young achievers in New York in June.



Southwest artist Fritz Scholder fascinated his young audience with a display of his painting techniques during the "Salute to Excellence."



and heard presentations by past recipients of the Academy's Golden Plate Award.

United Nations Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar was the first of nearly 40 adults to receive this year's Golden Plate. In addressing the astonishing changes occurring in the politics, economy and environment of today's world order, he told the young leaders they must have the same commitment to the future which is the mission of the United Nations in dealing with complex and stubborn problems. He charged them to apply patience, persistence and constancy to the monumental tasks of the future, and to have "hope without delusion and courage without recklessness."

Presentations were also made to James D. Robinson, III, head of American Express Company and to Marcus Roberts, jazz pianist sensation. Robinson encouraged his audience to be prepared for the competitiveness of life, and Roberts, before thrilling the crowd with his musical virtuosity, spoke of the challenges and inspiration of his life. Roberts has been blind since age four.

Historian/filmmaker Ken Burns was recognized for his monumental 11-hour film, "The Civil War." He recounted the extensive research which was necessary for the project, and he encouraged the students to utilize history as a source of inspiration for the present and for the future.



General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, thoughtfully listened to a question from a young leader at a symposium at the United Nations Building.

The opening symposium also included conversations with heart-transplant pioneer Dr. William DeVries, designer Ralph Lauren and jazz musician Wynton Marsalis. Their messages, from each unique perspective, conveyed a commonality of commitment, passion and inspiration for whatever one's chosen field may be. Dr. DeVries expressed the sentiments of the adult participants in the Academy's activities, saying he draws strength from the excitement, visions and dreams of the students.

The great diversity of accomplishment became more apparent as the Friday symposium continued to feature schol-

ars, businessmen, musicians, artists, military heroes, scientists, doctors, lawyers, government leaders and statesmen. Throughout the day at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, headquarters for this year's "Salute to Excellence," the students had the opportunity to exchange views with Nobel laureates, media celebrities and luminaries of arts and letters. Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer Edmund Morris accurately counseled the students, "When you meet public people of eminence, you will find they are regular folks."

Thoughtful, incisive questions from the young leaders, whether in an open forum or one-on-one with the "public people," produced an active dialogue of encouragement and respect. As the stories of success continued to enthrall the youngsters, several common elements were apparent, among them, creativity, the importance of family and the necessity to be of service to others. Robert Greenhill, President of Morgan Stanley Group, the eminent and influential investment banking firm, attributed his personal success to an active family life. "I know of no successful person who, on reflection, would say, 'I wish I had spent more time at the office.'"

Fashion designer Oscar de la Renta told the audience, "I am an example of the idea that the impossible is possible. My biggest reward is the ability to share with others." Novelist Tom Clancy ad-



Student leaders enjoyed an informal conversation with Oprah Winfrey during a cruise of New York Harbor.



Audrey Hepburn graciously discussed her career and her role as UNICEF Ambassador with young admirers.



With the New York skyline as a backdrop, author Tom Clancy happily responded to questions posed by a young achiever.



A presentation by opera star Leontyne Price was one of the highlights aboard a cruise ship during the "Salute to Excellence" weekend.



At the conclusion of the Banquet of the Golden Plate, General Norman Schwarzkopf obligingly signed every autograph requested of him by the young people and spoke personally with each of them.

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monished, "There is no success without helping other people."

As the entire group cruised in New York Harbor aboard a large yacht, presentations were made by FBI Director William Sessions, noted defense attorney, law professor and author Alan Dershowitz and operatic star Leontyne Price. A super-spectacular fireworks display at the Statue of Liberty was a thrilling and appropriately patriotic punctuation to the day's activities.

A Saturday lunch in the delegate's dining room at the United Nations provided a memorable experience for the students as they toured the facilities of the council of the world. At the U.N., inspired presentations were made by developer and philanthropist Samuel LeFrak,

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell and actress Audrey Hepburn. Miss Hepburn, who is UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, gave a dramatic challenge to become involved with the humanitarian needs of the world.

Throughout the day the young people had been introduced to such celebrities as Barbara Walters, actress Susan Lucci, filmmaker Martin Scorsese, Ambassador Sol Linowitz and immortal musician Dizzy Gillespie. No presenter, however, received a more enthusiastic and appreciative reception than General Norman Schwarzkopf, Commander-in-Chief of Operation Desert Storm. His inspiring, moving and patriotic message, delivered in his trademark desert battle fatigues, brought a rousing and sustained show of appreciation from the audience.

The sparkling climax to the "Gathering of the Greats" was the formal Banquet of the Golden Plate at the Waldorf-Astoria. Talk show hostess Oprah Winfrey presided over the festivities as each adult honoree was presented the symbol of success as determined by the American Academy of Achievement. With specially written lyrics to his song "My Way," songwriter/entertainer Paul Anka performed a stirring concluding tribute to the Academy and to its adult

and student leaders, "You did it your way."

During the course of the "Salute to Excellence," 10 students were recognized by the Academy as "exemplars of excellence" and were awarded "The Golden Eagle Award for the Promise of Greatness." Among the young leaders so honored were the two top Elks National Foundation scholars, Kenneth Andersen of Auburn, Massachusetts, and Cathy Nguyen of Myerstown, Pennsylvania. Ken is now enrolled at Yale University, studying mathematics, and Cathy is at Harvard, pursuing a career in medicine.

Other scholars sponsored by the Foundation at the weekend in New York were Mary Else of Belvidere, Nebraska, studying actuarial science at the University of Nebraska; Shelley Mendenhall of Willamina, Oregon, enrolled at Brigham Young University to become a studio artist; Shilo Ramos of Sheboygan, Wisconsin, studying mathematics at the University of Wisconsin; and F. B. Mack of Gatlinburg, Tennessee, studying business and playing football at Furman University.

The Elks National Foundation is a patron and sponsor of the American Academy of Achievement, a non-profit organization fostering excellence in America's young people. ■