

Golden Eagle Awards Dinner Speech by Bill Brown, March 19, 2010

Thank you, General Flowers, for those very kind words and introduction. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I am deeply humbled and honored to have been selected as one of two recipients of this year's Golden Eagle Award which symbolizes American dedication and spirit to a greater good. I am equally honored to receive this award in the same year that one of my heroes, retired General Eric K. Shinseki, a great American and a former Army Chief of Staff that I had the pleasure of serving under, is honored for outstanding contributions to national security. Life simply does not get any better than this!

It has been a long journey for me from public housing in Turners Station, Maryland, just outside of Baltimore, to this podium tonight. A journey that took me to Hampton and Harvard Universities and around the world. A journey made possible by many of you seated in this room and to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. You took the time and had the patience to provide opportunities for me to practice the profession of engineering in both the public and private sectors with world class professionals.

The first part of my public career was spent with Air Force Civil Engineering, and I thank my Air Force family for providing me with great friends and mentors such as Bill Poad, James Boatwright, Duke Wright, Jim McCarthy, Bud Ahearn, Harry Rietman and Bob Wolff. These are just some of the folks who got me ready for that next level of commitment to public service as a member of the senior executive service with the Army Corps of Engineers.

To my beloved Corps of Engineers family: you broadened my horizon and allowed me to serve our great nation and the world as an engineer and diplomat, something only a handful of Americans have ever experienced. When you work alongside the likes of Al Carton, Generals Pat Stevens, Al Genetti, Joe Ballard, Carl Strock, Bob Flowers, Bo Temple, and Van Antwerp, and you have the encouragement of folks like Paul Johnson, former Assistant Secretary of the Army for Installations, you learn that nothing less than excellence in engineering is acceptable each and every day of the year.

To the entire leadership team at PageSoutherlandPage who are assembled here tonight from across our nation, thank you for allowing me to be a part of the leadership team of the greatest Architecture-Engineering firm in the world. A firm dedicated to designing quality environments for our men and women in uniform. A firm whose leadership team includes two Fulbright scholars and architects and engineers from the leading U.S. universities. Through our federal and our international practices you have allowed me to stay connected with people around the globe and to improve the quality of our natural and man-made environment. Equally important you have supported SAME's goals and programs.

To my private industry family, thank you for embracing me and sharpening my skills and abilities. Though we may compete against each other on any given day, we remain professionally bonded to each other and committed to the highest principles of our profession — principles embodied in individuals such as Mary Anderson, Gil Perry and Ron Brown.

My career has been in service to others. I could have answered no greater calling than to use my engineering skills to improve the quality of life for our military forces and their families. Tonight as we are celebrating, men and women, civilians and those in uniform, are carrying the fight around the world to those who would deny not just Americans but all people their rights.

President Franklin Roosevelt eloquently referred to these rights in his speech to our 77th congress as the four essential human freedoms:

“The first is freedom of speech and expression -- everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship in their own way -- everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want, which translated means a healthy peacetime life for people everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear of a nation committing an act of physical aggression against its inhabitants or another nation.”

These are the attributes that we hold near and dear to our hearts and that fuel and guide our spirits, our commitment and our service to each other. As a husband and a father I am pleased to say that the feeling of service to others is infectious and runs rampant in our family. My oldest son, who is with us tonight, recently returned from serving in Afghanistan with the Georgia National Guard as the only vascular surgeon in that country and was featured on CNN. This is the second time in the last three years that he has taken time off from his private practice to serve in a war zone. Four weeks ago my youngest son was deployed for the second time to Afghanistan. This is his sixth deployment since graduating from West Point in 1997. One of our sons' biggest supporters is our daughter, who received an appointment to the military academy but was medically disqualified due to a heart condition and subsequently became an environmental engineer.

Our family is a series of moving parts held together for 47 years by the most wonderful and supportive wife in the world, Dr. J. I am calling her by her professional rather than personal name to highlight that throughout our marriage she guided us, while pursuing her own professional goals. We eloped in college and were told our marriage would never work out – what little faith our friends had in our resiliency, our love and our ability to commit to something greater than ourselves.

It is this kind of commitment - this kind of resiliency - this kind of love- that I ask each and every one of you gathered here tonight to take to the youth in the Barrios of America - to the youth in the Ghettos of America - to the youth on Fifth Avenue - to the youth in Appalachia, to the youth all over our country. Let them know that there is a place in the field of architecture, in the field of engineering, in the field of planning, in construction where they can make a difference.

Tell them it is not where they came from that matters but where they are going. Tell them we can all join hands and improve the quality of life for people not only throughout America but throughout the world. Let them know that our College of Fellows, consisting of over 600 professionals, is dedicated to mentoring, to building a bench of design and construction professionals with the knowhow, the skills, the experience and the passion for improving this little round ball that we call Mother Earth. Tell them we just welcomed 26 new Fellows into our college who are eager to help, who have the energy, the

interest and the compassion to reach back and help others succeed. Let them know that America's engineering and architecture institutions are headed by some of the finest educators in the world, such as Dr. Eugene DeLoatch, Dean of the School of Engineering at Morgan State University in Baltimore, and who is with us tonight.

Let them know that America is truly a land of opportunity. Let them know that architecture and engineering are professions that will provide them with the opportunity to soar above and beyond their wildest dreams. Let them know we will be there helping them realize their dreams.

If you sense that they are wavering, if they say it is too hard a goal to achieve, tell them to get a copy of the book, "Touch the Top of The World," where they can read about Erik Weihenmayer – a blind man who did not let the challenges that life presented him prevent him from scaling the 3,300-foot rock wall of El Capitan and reaching the top of Mount Everest.

If a blind man can climb farther than the eye can see, those of us with the gift of sight can climb the ladder of success.

There is a spiritual that says – "If I can help somebody along the way then my living will not have been in vain." I hope that becomes my legacy; I hope that as we reach out to the next generation that becomes the legacy of everyone assembled here tonight.

In closing, Jackie and I thank you for this great honor, this spotlight moment, these 15 minutes in the sun as most folks say. Please reach out to our nation's youth. Think of it as the opportunity to grow our own future. Tell the youth about our profession. Tell them about duty, honor and country. Encourage them to become design and construction professionals, but regardless of which profession they choose, regardless of which path they elect to take in life, remind them to ***"Reach for the TOP-BECAUSE THE BOTTOM IS ALREADY FULL!"***

God Bless our Society and God Bless America! Essayons!!