

University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
April 7, 2009

### Bryan School Distinguished Alumni Award 2009

I want to thank you for that wonderful introduction, Martin Green.

I am honored and humbled by my selection to receive the Bryan School's Distinguished Alumni Award for 2009. I would like to thank Chancellor Brady, Dean Weeks, the Alumni Association and the selection committee for this award. A special thank you to Mary Ellen and the business school staff for the preparation and planning of this wonderful event. Dr. Weeks, we are very fortunate to have you as Dean of the Bryan School.

Even more humbling is to see the number of attendees here this evening. Mary Ellen told me we were at capacity two weeks ago and they had started a waiting list. It is so wonderful to see so many people that have made an impact on my life...family, friends, former professors, teachers, faculty, and administrators.

This year my wife Margo and I will celebrate 32 years of marriage. Our three children are in the audience: Tara, Kelli and Lee. Without the support of my wife over the years, recognition like this would not be possible.

Both of my parents are deceased. My father died when I was 9 years old. My mother remarried and my stepfather is alive, but could not travel because of his health. They all would be very proud of me for receiving this award.

I would like to mention other special guests that have traveled great distances to be here tonight. Barry and Kathy Williams, my brother- and sister-in-law. Greg and Jeannen Pridgeon: Greg is the Chief of Staff for the Mayor of Atlanta, Georgia. Phyllis Joyner, Bill Council, International Officer of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. Other special guests in the audience tonight, from North Carolina A&T: Dr. Michael Simmons and wife Catherine, and Jannette Suggs, Assistant to Dr. Craig, Dean of the School of Business and Economics at North Carolina A & T.

Coming to Greensboro...

What I call “the Village of Greensboro” not because of its size or specific characteristic in the traditional sense of the word itself, but somewhat metaphorical. A place or community/environment that fostered opportunity and educational programs within its boundaries. A place or center of major educational significance.

My Story...

In 1969 I enrolled in North Carolina A & T State University to pursue a degree in Business Administration. At the start of each semester my mother, a teacher in Virginia, would take me to her bank and draw out funds in the form of a certified check made payable to A & T for my tuition for that upcoming semester. She did not want me to have loans when I graduated. I knew that she worked hard over time to prepare for the expense of me going to college. The time and sacrifices she made represent in a real sense parts of her life that she had to forego. When I arrived at A & T, let's say I was very motivated. I worked very hard and was very focused. I finished A & T in 3 ½ years and did not attend summer school. During the summers, I did internships with Procter and Gamble and State Farm Insurance. What a great experience it was being at A & T and the preparation

and encouragement I got that would take me to another level. I had indeed experienced a slice of the “Village of Greensboro” at A & T.

Jannette Suggs who is/was the Administrative Assistant to Dr. Craig saw me in the hall at the business school one day in the fall of 1972 and said, “Leroy, do you know that you have enough credits to graduate in December?” I told her that I knew that I was ahead of schedule and had applied to a few graduate programs in business and law. I asked to speak with Dr. Craig to discuss various options for graduate studies that I was considering at the time. Dr. Craig told me about the graduate business program at UNCG. He also arranged a meeting with Dean Shelton, (dean of the School of Business and Economics at that time) at his office and attended it with me. After formally applying and taking the GMAT, I was later admitted to the Master of Science in Business Administration program and was awarded a research assistantship in the School of Business and Economics. This amounted to a full scholarship and living expenses. I had the opportunity to indeed experience another slice of the “Village of Greensboro” at UNCG.

My UNCG experience, both in and out of the classroom, was very challenging and enriching. I was assigned as a research assistant to Dr. Fornby (Chair of the Economics Department). Dr. Fornby was published and had done several academic works on the economics of race and discrimination on society as a whole in the United States. I also worked under Dr. Arthur Lee Svenson, Burlington Industries Professor of Economics and Management. Peter Drucker acknowledged Dr. Svenson’s help in the publication of his book entitled MANAGEMENT...Tasks – Responsibilities-Practices. Dr. Drucker had this to say about Dr. Svenson: “My old friend and former colleague Arthur

Lee Svenson, consistently helped with encouragement and criticism throughout the long months of gestation. I did not always welcome his exhortation. 'Try again; you can do better.' Nevertheless, the book owes a great deal to it -- and so do I." I can tell you I have heard those same words directed at me from Dr. Svenson, and believe me they were not always welcomed... I know the feeling.

Other distinguished faculty that I had the privilege of being taught by and/or working with as a research assistant included...Dr. Joe Johnson, Dr. Gentry, Dr. Flanagan-Finance (RA), Dr. Kahn, Professor Hofftizer (RA), and the staff of the world renowned Center for Creative Leadership.

Career- After graduating from UNCG I left the Village of Greensboro for New York City to work for Colgate Palmolive on Park Avenue in their Controllershship program. I had the opportunity to work for other companies like SCM, Consolidated Aluminum and Anheuser Bush over a seventeen-year period. For years I had the burning desire to start my own business. So I left the security of Corporate America, at that time, to venture out on my own. I had access to corporate aircraft and other perks.

Earlier, I mentioned that it is essential to have your spouse's support in such a move. My wife was an established teacher in the St. Louis County public schools. Our three children were in kindergarten to elementary school. We took a chance, started a business in the Detroit area, and have not looked back. Do not be afraid to take risks. Great success cannot be accomplished without taking risks. Always remember, success is never certain and failure never final.

The business has allowed me to continue to fulfill my God-given purpose in this life. It has at times been a struggle.

There have been failures and great successes. I have been able to give back to the communities where our business is located. I have enjoyed creating employment and watching people grow. I believe and live by “To Whom much is given much is expected!”

Again, I want to thank you for this award, which I will always treasure. A heart-felt thank you to all that came here tonight to share this great moment in my life...who would have thought that this day and recognition would have come for me... God Bless each of You!