Charter Day Makes History Once Again

Charter Day weekend descended upon us as one that was filled with history for a number of reasons: the unveiling of President Hurwitz’s portrait, this being President Hurwitz’s last Charter Day as President, and all of the award recipients except for one who received an honorary degree from Gallaudet, were alumni. Each one of these recipients is doing interesting things in the deaf community, breaking more barriers, paving the way for more opportunities for deaf people.

On Friday, April 10, the Laurent Clerc Cultural Fund (LCCF) committee of the Gallaudet University Alumni Association (GUAA), with the support of the alumni relations home office staff, hosted the unveiling of President T. Alan Hurwitz’s portrait in Chapel Hall. LCCF Chair Janet Weinstock, ’78 & G-'81, opened the program to a packed room. GUAA President Alyce Slater Reynolds, ’76 & G-'78, had the honor of unveiling the portrait.

Mr. Cedric Egeli, a master portraitist who painted President Hurwitz, commented during the unveiling that one of the things that makes the portrait unique is President Hurwitz holding his smartphone, which shows how reliant on technology we have become. Those in attendance remarked on how beautiful the portrait was and how it captured President Hurwitz in a natural way.

Mr. Egeli comes from a family of artists. When the LCCF committee asked Mr. Egeli to do the portrait, they learned that Mr. Egeli’s father (Bjorn) did the portrait of President Leonard M. Elstad, G-'23, that currently hangs in Chapel Hall.

The program concluded with a reception, and as is done by tradition, the portrait will be hung sometime after President Hurwitz retires from Gallaudet in December 2015.

Friday evening brought together the award recipients, their guests, the LCCF, GUAA Board, President and Mrs. Hurwitz, and their families together for the traditional barbecue. The Hurwitzes have hosted this every year for the award recipients. In the past, the barbecue has been held on the patio at House One but due to the inclement weather we were expecting this year, it was held on the Upper Level of Peikoff Alumni House. No one seemed to mind too much as everyone had a good time at the casual and informal event.

Charter Day on Saturday, April 11 continued its “tradition” of being held on a gorgeous, warm, sunny spring day, reminding us spring was in the air after a long, hard winter and this set the tone for the program as everyone was in an exuberant mood. Dean Genie Gertz, ’92, was the mistress of ceremony and as guests feasted on brunch fare, Gertz briefly documented Gallaudet’s history as to how Charter Day was founded. She also gave a brief update on what Gallaudet is doing to open up more opportunities for alumni by offering online courses, as well as new programs in several different areas.

The awards presentation began when Andrew S. Phillips, ’06, was presented with the Outstanding Young Alumnus Award recognizing him primarily for his work with the NAD,
advocating for deaf and hard of hearing individuals on different issues. Tina Jo Breindel, '81, received the Pauline “Polly” Peikoff, E-'36, “Service to Others” Award, recognizing her for her volunteerism with many local and national level organizations. Upon accepting the award, Tina Jo remarked she personally knew Polly Peikoff and had always looked up to her as a role model so she felt very honored to be receiving the award.

Before the LCCF Awards were presented, Sam Sonnenstrahl, '79 & G-'84, executive director of alumni relations and GUAA, along with Brian Bush, '92, unveiled a painting Bush had done of Peikoff Alumni House. Bush donated the painting to the alumni office and it will hang in the alumni house so the next time you are in town, be sure to stop by to see the beautiful painting which is a remarkable replica of Ole Jim down to the color of the front door!

Stephen C. Baldwin, ’68, took the stage, accepting the Laurent Clerc Award. Baldwin has been an accomplished teacher, playwright, director, producer, and has done intensive research and written about Erastus “Deaf” Smith, an American frontiersman, knowing for his service in Texas. The Alice Cogswell Award went to Henry A. “Hank” Klopping, H-’03, who served as superintendent for the California School for the Deaf, Fremont, for 36 years which is one of the longest serving tenures of any school executive in the nearly 200 – year history of deaf education in the United States. Dr. Klopping has gone beyond his job, mentoring and fostering the personal, professional, and intellectual development of countless deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Many who have worked with and for Hank throughout the years have become leaders in their own right. Usman Ahmed Nahuche, ’91, of Nigeria, was presented the Edward Miner Gallaudet Award, for his work helping the deaf community in Nigeria, Usman recently retired as Parliament Secretary in the Ministry of finance in Zamfara State, a top–ranking neo-political career civil servant which is equivalent to a Cabinet department undersecretary in the United States government. The Amos Kendall Award went to Lori Ann Voelker Kober, ’90, the first licensed deaf female mortician, funeral director, and funeral home owner in the United States as she owns two funeral homes in South Dakota. Lori even had her hometown of Vermillion, named Lori Kober Day on September 26 by Governor Dennis Daugaard.

If you like what you have read so far about the award recipients, to learn more about them, please go to the link: http://tinyurl.com/2015CharterDay

A special thanks goes to the presenters who introduced the award recipients for their beautiful presentations: Claude Stout, ’78 & G-’80 (Phillips), Beth Sonnenstrahl Benedict, ’80 & PhD ’03 (Breindel), Michael Moore, ’68 (Baldwin), James Tucker, ’81 (Klopping), Olugbenga Aina, G-’97 (Nahuche) and Daphne Cox, ’82 (Kober).
President’s portrait unveiling of President Hurwitz holding his smartphone

Painting of Peikoff Alumni House ("Ole Jim") by Brian Bush, ’92

Charter Day award recipients with those who were part of the program. Left to right: Janet Weinstock, Samuel Sonnenstrahl, Alyce Slater Reynolds, Andrew Phillips, Hank Klopping, Usman Nahuche, Lori Kober, Steve Baldwin, Tina Jo Breindel, President T. Alan Hurwitz, Genie Gertz