



Benham speaks and four receive Fulfilling the Dream Awards at annual Freedom Breakfast

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Athens, Ga. – “If you’re going to dream, dream big enough”—that’s the message Georgia Supreme Court Justice Robert Benham gave at the fifth annual Freedom Breakfast Jan. 18 at UGA’s Georgia Center for Continuing Education Conference Center and Hotel where four people received the 2008 President’s Fulfilling the Dream Awards for community service.

This year’s award recipients are Patricia Clifton, Derrick Floyd, Robert Hill and Esther Sherman.

Themed “The Power of the Dream: Transforming One Life at a Time,” the breakfast celebrated the memory and dream of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in honor of his birthday – observed in January as a national holiday.

“There is no excuse for not dreaming,” said Benham, Georgia’s first African-American Supreme Court Justice and UGA’s second African-American Law School Graduate.

Benham, the keynote speaker, marched with King in the 1960s. He recounted memories of all-white schools, segregated water fountains and city council meetings his family couldn’t attend.

He recalled being spit on while marching with King, only to revisit that same spot 40 years later as a Supreme Court Justice.

“Standing on that very spot, I knew that my time had come,” he said. “Your time will continue to come, if you are patient, and if you are willing to persevere.”

Benham, who went from experiencing segregated courtroom seating to presiding over the state’s judicial system, stressed the importance of fighting for freedom and called King’s “I Have a Dream” speech one of the pillars of American freedom.

Addressing an overflow audience of 450 people, UGA President Michael F. Adams said, “These kinds of gathering are what Dr. King lived, dreamed and died for: different entities, different people, different races, different ethnicities, different backgrounds, different religious beliefs working together, not working apart, to make this world a better place and improve the quality of life and quality of the human experience for everyone.”

Clifton was recognized for her work as coordinator of the Young Scholars Program at UGA. A former principal of Hilsman Middle School, she came out of retirement to help with the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences’ program, which offers pre-collegiate opportunities for minority students, including visiting a research lab in Costa Rica or schools in Ghana. Under her guidance, the program has ballooned from hosting six students in 2000 to more than 70 in recent years. More than 300 students have graduated from the program, and 98 percent of them then moved on to four-year colleges and universities across the nation.

Floyd was honored for his 15 years of service with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Athens. Serving as the club's director of operations Floyd, or "the Big D" as he's known among the young people with whom he works, oversees the operations of five facilities in Clarke, Barrow and Elbert counties, often acting as a surrogate father figure and role model to disadvantaged children. A former UGA basketball player, he also tutors students at W.R. Coile Middle School several days a week and offers the students UGA basketball tickets for achieving goals they create together.

Robert Hill, an associate professor in UGA's College of Education, was recognized for his leadership and the example he leads in local, regional and international communities. Hill has dedicated his time to studying and researching anti-oppression education, gender and race in organizational settings, sexual orientation and gender justice, human rights education in an international context, environmental justice and racism, activism as the practice of education for social change, diversity instruction and adult education. At UGA, he has been instrumental in helping the university's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community move forward, helping to showcase problems the groups face and offer solutions.

Sherman, a project architect at the UGA physical plant, was commended for her tireless volunteer spirit and dedication to community causes. She volunteers as a troop leader with a local Girl Scout troop, mentors Hispanic youth at her church and serves on a committee for UGA's Staff Council. She also devotes her time to Hands-On Athens, the March of Dimes, Relay for Life, the Sandy Creek Nature Center, the Athens-Clarke County Heritage Foundation and Habitat for Humanity.

"The dream is alive," said Cheryl Dozier, associate provost for institutional diversity, after the presentations. "I invite each of you to envision the power of the dream, by making a personal commitment in 2008 to transform one life at a time."

The Freedom Breakfast was cosponsored by the University of Georgia, the Athens-Clarke County Government and the Clarke County School District.

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Note to editors: A photo of the award recipients is available for download at <http://www.ugaphoto.alumni.uga.edu/news/24248-277.jpg>.

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