

February 28, 2007

VIRGINIA TECH CONDUCTOR

A GUIDE FOR OUR JOURNEY TOWARD EXCELLENCE, EQUITY, AND EFFECTIVENESS

YOLANDA KING'S CAPTIVATING PRESENTATION

by Alicia Cohen



Yolanda King, the eldest daughter of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King, began her powerful and provocative presentation with some of the following statements about her father:

He was a king, but not the kind you bow down to.
He fought injustice with a sword of nonviolence and a shield of prayer.
He was a kin to all of humanity.
He crowned a movement that illuminated a dream.
He was a king who labored at the feet of servants with a voice of clarity, conviction, and compassion.
His voice lives on in the voice of all of us who believe in freedom.

She went on to remind the audience that in order to achieve the dream, we must use the power of choice that is available to us. We can choose our reaction, our response in any circumstance. We can choose to be part of the problem or the solution. We can throw up our hands and be hopeless or get up off our apathy. Her father helped to compel, inspire, and motivate people to bring about positive change, and through that the condition of many communities was transformed.



she wanted on that bus for the first time. In that skit she reminded the audience that in 381 days without any violence they brought the bus system in Montgomery, Alabama, to its knees.

Again she returned to the need for action. King reminded the audience that we can all be change agents and take responsibility. Everyone can be great because everyone can serve. It is up to us to alleviate hunger, homelessness, and illiteracy and to promote interracial cooperation, justice, and peace.

King entertained, enlightened, and energized the audience through her performance. Her father would have been proud.



King in one of the various character roles during the performance. Photos by Roger Link

King then took on the role of different characters from the past. In the first role she was a black girl who was about to experience riding a bus and being able to sit wherever

HIGH SCHOOL/HIGH TECH STUDENTS VISIT CAMPUS

by Jody Thompson

What can I do with an engineering degree? What is human factors engineering? These



Jeffery Merola, a Blacksburg High School student participated in a demonstration of how engineers study a person's gait. Dr. Thurmon Lockhart's Locomotion Laboratory and his team of student researchers investigate ways to prevent people from slipping and falling. Photos by Roxanna Link

were just a couple of the questions asked by the Montgomery County, Va., High School/High Tech (HSHT) students on a recent tour of the Human Factors Engineering and Ergonomics Center (HFEEC) at Virginia Tech.

HSHT is a program that introduces high school students with disabilities to careers in science, engineering, and technology. The program's goal is to encourage students to enter a college or university once they complete high

school to obtain additional training in these fields. The students are introduced to these careers primarily through site visits. Students also have an opportunity to participate in internships during the summer.

The HSHT students learned a variety of information during the tour, such as human factors engineering or ergonomics examines the interactions between humans and systems or devices. The faculty at the HFEEC investigate ways to make interactions efficient and safe, while being mindful of an individual's abilities and limitations. The tour of HFEEC was coordinated by Dr. Tonya Smith-Jackson and hosted by the HFEEC faculty.

Julie Ligon, supervisor for special education for MCPS, says that HSHT allows students to interact with scholars and professionals in our community and to learn valuable information. When asked about the skills learned by participating in HSHT, Ligon stated, "First, because they [HSHT students] are treated like college students,

they learn a lot about the expectations of students by academia. Second, they learn about opportunities that may be available to them in fields of their choice. Third, they gain leadership and collaboration skills as they progress through the program with their peers."

When asked how the Virginia Tech community can better assist HSHT, Ligon pointed to "continued access, providing workshops and educational opportunities and understanding and respecting the academic needs and dreams of students with disabilities."

HSHT is an initiative of the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor. HSHT of Montgomery County is a partnership between Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), Virginia Tech, and the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center (CRC). There are 22 students who currently participate in the program, and they attend Christiansburg, Auburn, Eastern Montgomery, and Blacksburg High Schools.

DIVERSITY

SPOTLIGHT STORY

Journey toward Excellence, Equity, and Effectiveness

THE VIRGINIA TECH DIVERSITY SUMMIT: A TEN YEAR JOURNEY

by Benjamin Dixon, Vice President for Multicultural Affairs, Emeritus

Congratulations on another successful Diversity Summit! We owe a debt of gratitude to the Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity for organizing a creative, energizing and authentic set of experiences and conversations on three important issues that impact our community's ability to be truly inclusive: communicating across language barriers; increasing awareness and acceptance of social, cultural, and racial differences; and, understanding the impact of economic disparity on a community's ability to thrive within the global environment. Reflecting openly on these three issues was a sobering experience for many of us. Despite the progress we have made within the university community over the past 10 years, we know there is much more to be done to properly recognize, value, and optimize the diversity among us.



Participants in the "World Trade Game." Groups had to work together to make products with differing resources. It illustrated how powerful groups interact with groups of people who have fewer resources.

Even after 10 years of Diversity Summits, this forum remains a viable tool for building awareness of diversity and multicultural issues and exploring strategies for reducing isolation, inequities, and cultural ignorance. The Diversity Summit continues to be an opportunity for all members of the Virginia Tech community to build their personal and collective competencies in living, learning, and working in increasingly diverse environments. Therefore, it is important that we celebrate this tenth year anniversary by staying focused and clear about the purpose and role of the Diversity Summit in the life of the university, and by seeking synergies with other

activities and groups to maximize the impact of our diversity work overall.

As we move forward, clarity, transparency, and open, public, and constructive discourse should be the order of the day—our standard operating procedure. Our commitment to this public discourse has been demonstrated by a growing number of Virginia Tech students, staff, and faculty over the past 10 years who are engaged in substantive community discussions of diversity.

We are right to celebrate 10 years of conversation,



"Classified" by Megan Carney, a play, explores issues of homophobia, racism, and other forms of discrimination on the Virginia Tech campus from a student perspective. Photos by Roxanna Link

information sharing, assessment, and action planning. However, I suspect we will be doing the same thing 10 years from now—hopefully, not because we would have failed to make significant progress in building our inclusive community, but because we will have come to understand that diversity is not so much a destination, but more of a journey. In fact, our very success at recruiting and retaining a truly diverse student body and work force will foster even greater vigilance and proactive efforts to ensure that we sustain our capacity and commitment to value inclusion, equity, and social and economic justice.

In 1998 this event could only draw about 60-70 people from across the campus. Now we average between 150-250. What we are witnessing is a maturing of this institution with respect to our

diversity efforts. It may not be fast enough or deep enough for many of us, but we are growing, and we need to celebrate this.

When other universities contact us to benchmark our diversity activities, the Diversity Summit is one of the best practices they cite, along with the Diversity Strategic Plan, the Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity, and, most recently, the Virginia Tech Principles of Community. What these universities soon discover upon further investigation is that the summit is not just an annual campus event but a model process for other diversity forums across the campus, not necessarily sponsored by the Office of Multicultural Affairs, but by an increasing number of colleges, departments, and other units within the university community.

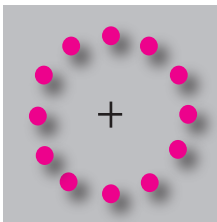
Finally, I want to leave with you one of my favorite quotes. It is not a quote from Dr. King himself, but it is a quote from someone who foreshadowed King's work, Frederick Douglass, a slave who purchased his own freedom and went on to become a national advocate for individual rights, and a writer and publisher of an abolitionist newspaper.

"Those who profess to favor FREEDOM—
Yet deprecate agitation
Are men who want crops
Without plowing the ground
They want rain without
Thunder and lightning
They want the ocean without
The awful roar of its many waters."

Let us not be discouraged by the occasional "thunder and lightning" we experience on our diversity journey. Let's make a commitment to turn the "awful roar of its many waters" into a symphony of different voices and perspectives all focused on the common task of building a community that is both inclusive and just.

WHAT MY EYES SEE: A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Michael Hunt



My mom sent me this e-mail the other day that really got me thinking about the ways in which our mind may trick us into seeing things that aren't real. The e-mail was a pink dot that was rotating around a black crosshair in the middle of the page, and when you just looked

at the picture, it appeared to be a circle composed of pink dots where one dot would disappear in sequence around the circle. It would appear that there was one dot missing from the circle at every instant in time. If you were to focus on the crosshairs, then you would begin to see a green dot in place of the missing dot traveling around the circle. And if you focused on the crosshair long enough, the pink dots would all disappear, and all that was left was this green dot rotating around the crosshairs. I describe all of the details of this e-mail because I begin to think about how our focal points in life impact the way that we see the big picture or even other people.

For example, if we focus on the way that a person dresses, we begin to formulate in our minds an image of who that person is, which most of the time is not real. If we focus on the way that a person talks without listening to the words that they are saying to us, we begin to formulate thoughts as to that person's intelligence level and where they are from. But if we focus on the soul of a person, we begin to see him or her in a completely different light. Now this is to say that in the e-mail that my mother sent me, there was only one pink dot, and there certainly were no green dots, but your focal point on that picture completely changes your perception of what you are looking at.

It is very easy for us to take a quick glance at the people around us and to subconsciously feel that we know their entire life story and who they are, but in reality we have no idea what they've been through or who they are. We can take a few minutes to talk to someone and our mind's subconscious notions of who that person is change ever so slightly, but we still feel as if we know who they are and what they are all about without truly knowing that person.

Then we become surprised when these people that we call friends are completely different from what we thought that they would be. If we know them so well from our preconceived notions, then why are we surprised when we learn that the guy who dresses like a thug straight out of the movies has a fondness for poetry? Why do we allow ourselves to be consumed by the box of prejudice only to have our prejudices shattered over and over again? Despite that fact, we always run back to that idea that what you see is what you get and that though you may not be able to judge a book by its cover, you can determine its value.

I try not to subscribe to such ideas, but for whatever reason my mind continues to seek out these incorrect perceptions of people based on what I see of them, not on what I know of them. It is a flaw in the human character that I believe stems from the inherent evil in all of us and the desire to see oneself as better than those around us. For whatever reason, we subscribe to an illusion and allow our eyes to continue to play tricks on us.

VOLUNTEERS HELP THE WOMEN'S CENTER AT VIRGINIA TECH ACHIEVE ITS MISSION

by Kelly Shannon

The Women's Center at Virginia Tech provides remarkable services to the campus and surrounding community through its various program offerings such as SAVES (Sexual Assault and Violence Education by Students), Cornerstone and Kids Night Out programs. The Center strives to raise awareness of women's issues and celebrate women's achievements through programs that include a wide range of volunteer opportunities for students and local citizens.

According to Sharrika Davis, programming graduate assistant, this past year volunteers donated about 3,500 hours to the Center. Volunteering at the Women's Center provides students and local citizens the opportunity to develop leadership skills, make friends, and help improve the community.

One outreach program staffed by volunteers is the Tekoa program. Tekoa is a private, non-profit agency that provides residential treatment and special education for adolescents who are experiencing difficulties at home, in school or in the community. The aim of Tekoa is to improve the lives and futures of at-risk youth, resulting in stronger, healthier, more sustainable communities.

The Women's Center hosts Tekoa residents for a daylong visit to campus. Three or four volunteers are needed to serve on the planning committee and help with the activities on the day of the visit. One such volunteer is Amy Clements.

Clements, originally from Springfield, Va. is an undergraduate at Virginia Tech. She is an Entrepreneurship, Innovation, Technology Management major. (Management EIT). Clements has volunteered often throughout her life.

Because she also works at the Center as a receptionist she is aware of the need for volunteers. She has taken advantage of at least three opportunities to donate her time to the Women's Center.

"I volunteer at the Women's Center because it is such a positive place," said Clements, "and I want to make a difference for the campus and community." Clements heard that the Tekoa program needed help so she decided to go to a meeting and joined the committee.

"I believe we got an amazing response from the girls," said Clements, "and another group will be back next semester."

Another young woman who volunteers at the Center is Aaran Kelley. Kelley is a native of the Richmond area, and is an undergraduate student at Virginia Tech majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies.

Kelley said she has been volunteering since middle school because of positive motivation from her mother. "Women's issues are very important to me," said Kelley, "and the Center does so very much for this campus and community. In addition, the women here are so amazing there is always such good energy that I enjoy spending time here."

Kelley chose to volunteer with Tekoa because she worked with a residential treatment facility for teens in another area and saw the importance of encouraging the young girls to achieve their goals and be successful. "They had a lot of negative things happen in their lives," said Kelley, "but they still have a chance to turn them around into something positive, like going to college."

Seeing the reactions of the teens and knowing that they are enjoying themselves and learning a lot about Virginia Tech and college in general is a positive result for her. According to Kelley, the teachers complimented the volunteers on their interaction with the girls, and said they could tell how much the girls liked it by their good behavior and positive reactions.

Jennifer Butler from the Fredericksburg area, and a 2006 Virginia Tech graduate has been a volunteer at The Women's Center for over three years.

"I enjoy volunteering at The Women's Center," said Butler, "because it's one of those events that gives meaning to my life. I think that by helping others it allows me to be a better person." Butler said that the Center is a place of comfort for her, and the people who work there empower her. She is currently employed at the center part time as Project SAFE Coordinator.

Tekoa is an important project to Butler because she works with adolescents who have been through some very difficult times, and she feels that it is always important to support our future generations. "Sometimes," said Butler, "they just need contact with people other than their counselors, teachers, classmates, etc., and I really hope that I make a difference in at least one of their lives."

The Tekoa project is just one of the volunteer programs sponsored by The Women's Center. Those interested in volunteering may contact Penny Cook, Volunteer and Operations Manager, at 540-231-7806, onecent@vt.edu, or online at www.womenscenter.vt.edu.

VAHCC GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES CONFERENCE

ABOUT 'THE CONDUCTOR'

The Conductor is produced three times a year by Virginia Tech's Multicultural Fellows and is published by the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

All members of the university community are invited to contribute. Please submit articles to the editorial board at multicultural@vt.edu. Back issues are online at www.multicultural.vt.edu/conductor

Editorial Board

Reza Barkhi, 231-5869, reza@vt.edu
Alicia Cohen, 231-1820, acohen@vt.edu
Jean Elliott, 231-5915, elliottj@vt.edu
Judith Snoke, 231-6963, eslsnoke@vt.edu
Ray Williams, 231-8584, cwilliam@vt.edu

Production

Roxanna Link, Coordinator of Communications, Office of Multicultural Affairs, 231-2610, roxanna@vt.edu

The Office of Multicultural Affairs in collaboration with VAHCC announces the Global Perspectives and Opportunities Conference in Richmond, on May 2-3, 2007. The focus of the conference will be global education and international trade initiatives between Spain, Latin America and the Commonwealth of Virginia. The event will provide opportunities for university, business, and government leaders to share ideas through focused conversation.

The conference is being held in collaboration with the (VAHCC) Fourth Annual Gala. The Gala typically attracts 700 local, national, and international participants. This year expected guests include ambassadors from Spain, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Chile, Columbia, El Salvador, Honduras, Peru, Costa Rica and Paraguay; and international business leaders, Vice President of EDS and President of Goya Foods. At the state level, the Secretary of Commerce and Trade, the Governor of Virginia, and former Virginia Governor, now Richmond Mayor, will participate. The conference should provide excellent opportunities to learn more about Hispanic communities and businesses throughout the Commonwealth.

Faculty, students, and staff from the Blacksburg and regional centers will have the opportunity to meet with members of the Virginia Hispanic community, local and international Hispanic business leaders, and government leaders during the conference and the Gala event. The conference begins with a luncheon and panel discussion at the Omni Hotel on May 2nd.

The Hispanic Gala, sponsored by VAHCC, will be held in the historic Science Museum of Virginia. It begins with a reception and silent auction at 6:00 p.m., followed by dinner, live music and dancing at 7:00 p.m. The Honorable Governor Tim Kaine will address the audience and corporate sponsors will announce scholarship opportunities. The Science Museum is home of the Virginia Tech Solar Home which will be available for guests to tour.

Events on May 3rd include a breakfast, poster session, and cultural workshop. The poster session features Virginia Tech participants sharing expertise and programs in global initiatives, learning, diversity, and international trade. Other institutions and businesses will complement the exhibits. The conference concludes with a Hispanic business and culture workshop.

Dr. Mark McNamee, Provost; Dr. Richard E. Sorensen, Dean of the Pamplin College of Business; Dr. James Bohland, Vice President of the DC Capital Regional campus; faculty from OIRED and other areas of the university are participating in the event. Mr. Kevin McDonald, Director of the Office for Equal Opportunity, will be sponsoring student delegates to participate in this global conference.

We encourage the Virginia Tech community to register for the conference. For additional information, contact Jane Ann Williams, Director of Education and Training, Office of Multicultural Affairs 540 231 0984 or janeann@vt.edu

A TRIBUTE TO MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

by Juanisha C. Brooks



Juanisha C. Brooks recites her poem at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Kickoff Celebration featuring Yolanda King. Photo by Roger Link

I want to be like Martin
Marching in the name of equality and peace
Letting hate roll off my back, like sweat in summers heat
Letting all burdens go and pressing on in defeat
See when things got tough
He persevered with the freedom that still resides in my veins
But in this day and time
How can we be so vain?
The brown color of his skin was shunned
Yet he is celebrated by the hue of the stain that took his life
Even though he is gone,
His legacy still lives on
Ask yourself
Is the dream still alive?
Or do we hide behind false pretenses and claim to march in victories
Once larger than life and fighting
We are dying for unjust causes
Days are filled with questioning identities
And what we should wear
Fight ourselves and amongst nations to support the war on terror
King was fighting the war on inequality way before our generation
Knew of weapons of mass destruction
Racial slurs were the weapons that led to self destruction
Self hate, and doubt of the worse kind
Water hoses were the bombs of choice
Exploding into the souls of those marching for a cause
King wasn't a criminal but found his home behind bars
Hate for him caused scars
But never did he stir

His dream never became deferred
With a Nobel Peace Prize at 35, some thought this was absurd
Though his people were oppressed and depressed
He still pressed on
And he stood up for what he believed in
Yet sat when he needed to
Even though You can't sit here became the slogan of the enemy
Who lived in a brainwashed world, that could not be dry cleaned
There were no ipods to drown out the truths of the day
Without pod cast
King broadcast his voice to thousands at once
There were no googles to search for answers to hate
Or cool quotes to add in speeches
No blogs to gather everyone around to have a peaceful discussion
No you tubes to escape from the reality of what's going on
My space was Our space
My problems were your problems
King had more than 99 of them, and hating wasn't one
Perseverance was Kings top technological advance of the day
Who else could speak thousands of times with something powerful to say
Though discriminated against
King still embraced all of man kind
With Freedom in Mind
Hate rose to the occasion, but peace wasn't far behind
If equality was a country King would be a city in this state of mind
A man is said to be defined
By his reaction to moments of adversity and hate
On his watch diversity was not on time,
But it was never too late
Looking up at moments of hating
my own skin and saying "King We Need You"
Not realizing the dream is still here and he breathes in me too
He is the muscle in my neck as my head is held high
Never needing aid in school kings legacy is my my full ride
Without a leader like King I would not be in my institution of choice
Maybe institutionalized after thinking in this world I had no voice
Based on what society thought of the color of my skin
His fight wasn't with his fists but it came from within
In the face of adversity he rose like a true King
That didn't need a crown
He was beaten temporarily but not held down
As he reigns on the dynasty of equal justice for all
I salute Martin Luther King Jr. never defeated, with a Legacy that still stands tall.