



Title: Commencement Address to TAMU-T Graduating Class, Spring 2007 upon receiving Honorary Doctor of Leadership Degrees from Texas A&M University – Texarkana.

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Mrs. Arnold: Thank you, Texas A&M University, for this wonderful honor.

Dr. Michael McKinney, Dr. Stephen Hensley, and the A&M Board of Regents, I am overwhelmed with appreciation and with gratitude for your kindness. I know I am not the first, nor will I be the last to have this honor bestowed upon them, but I can promise you no one will ever treasure it more. Congratulations to all the graduates here today. This day is really yours. You made the commitment of time, you did the work, and whatever happens to you in your life from this day forward, no one can ever take your education away from you. I applaud you and share in the happiness of your family and friends today. We're truly fortunate to have Texas A&M in our community and grateful that they would make the investment of time and money and enable us to have this wonderful new campus that is currently underway. Because of A&M our community's young people have access to affordable higher education. Without them, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for some of you here today to have earned a university degree. We are forever in their debt for believing in our community, and giving us the foundation to have an educated workforce that will make us competitive in our cities' recruitment of new businesses and corporations. The honorary degree given to me and to Truman today is for leadership and I'd like to share with you what leadership is about to me. You have a vision of making a difference and you couple it with integrity, common sense, hard work, and discipline and the result is true selfless leadership. John F. Kennedy said leadership and learning are indispensable to each other. You are our community's brightest and best and you are our future leaders. We've been blessed to have many fine role models for you to look to in this city, individuals that have made, and continue to make an enormous difference in our everyday lives.

Frances Holcombe

Frances started Opportunities, Inc. over forty years ago. I know all of you are probably familiar with Opportunities. I don't know what others do, but in our community because of Francis Holcomb, our special needs children and adults have a place to have those needs met from the time they are born until the time they die.

Dr. Shirley Finn

Because of Dr. Shirley Finn, Texarkana has its own school of nursing. While other cities struggle to recruit nurses to fill their clinics and hospitals, we're educating our own and are able to have a thriving medical community because of it.

The minister who saw a need for this church over twenty years ago took some grief from many who said it was totally unnecessary and would just be a big white elephant that would never be filled. I actually heard that said, but this church from the time they opened the doors, has been full to overflowing for every service.

Dr. Stephen Hensley

I think his middle name is Tenacity. Because of Dr. Hensley we have under construction a full-scale, four year university with its own beautiful campus and many additional advanced degree programs that will give us an educated workforce. I don't know of anything that could give us the kind of financial growth edge that this university will. It has been a dream of mine and of Truman's for so long that I had about decided that was all it ever would be, and without the leadership, the tenacity and the perseverance of

Dr. Hensley, it would still be that – just a dream. We're so grateful that Dr. Hensley and his lovely wife, MaryAnn, adopted our community as their own. They took this expansion project on full force and made it a reality. They've also played a significant role in advancing other projects in our community, and they are both true leaders.

The role models I've mentioned are only to name a few. The list goes on and on. So many that have made such a difference in the quality of life that you and I enjoy in our community every day. It behooves each of us to learn from them and carry forward by doing our part to make a difference where we can. My wish for each of you graduates here today is that you find your passion in life if you have not already found your passion. Search out your strengths, where your interests lie, and what you're good at doing. And then, as my husband is fond of saying, "You just start the ball rolling and catch it before it gets to the end." If you follow your strengths, your passion will usually find you. By having a passion, you find your purpose and a venue for making a contribution to society, and I believe at the end of the day the contribution we make to life is where we get our value of self worth. The unhappiest people I've ever known are the ones who never found anything they were passionate about. They never found a purpose for their life or a way of making a contribution to others. Each of you has something special to offer. Be passionate about your life as you live it and, to quote Garth Brooks, "Don't miss the dance." Don't be so afraid of making a mistake that you miss out on any of the Lord's bountiful blessings. Thank you.

Mr. Arnold: At Century Bank when something extra special, over the top, exceeds expectations comes about we call it a WOW event. Well, I'm going to tell you for Anita and me this is a WOW event and thank you A&M, Dr. Hensley, the people that Anita mentioned. Congratulations to you graduates, you families, friends, associates. It is indeed a pleasure to share this day with you. There are probably a few surprised people here and about that never thought this would happen to you, maybe even your parents, certainly some of my friends, but this is a very, very special day for all of us and it is time to share it, to enjoy it, to rejoice in it, but then Monday comes around and what are we going to do then? When Dr. Hensley talked to me about this he said, "Now you do understand this is not recognition for what you've done. This is a challenge to you for what you're going to do." I said, "I'm not through. I've been doing this for a long time around here." He said, "Well you've got a new challenge. We've got a lot of work to

do and how we're going to go about it." Not to get into quoting Scripture, I get a little nervous in the pulpit anyhow, and I am not the best read. My wife is much better read than me, but for all my life my grandmother would say to me, "To whom much is given, much is expected." My wife googled this for me and it is found in Luke 12:48. Now I'm not going to preach to you because that would be the height of hypocrisy for me and I don't want lightning to strike any of us, but it is something I have valued all of my life. Claude Pinkerton was my mentor and my great-uncle. We came from some very tough beginnings around here. Many of you are no different; it's always been kind of tough around here relative to other parts of the country. But because of my mentor, Claude Pinkerton, because of the leadership of this community, Anita and I have been able to share dreams that are really pretty remarkable. Payne Stewart said, "It's nice to be able to have a dream and be able to live it." We certainly have lived our dream, coming out of the foundation of education from this community. I went by way of Pleasant Grove, Nash, TISD and Texarkana College to Lamar University which is not really the Harvard of the south, and have been able to live my dream, our dream. Einstein said imagination is as important as knowledge. So we have this foundation of knowledge and now it's up to us to have the foundation. Dare to dream, dare to pursue a dream, but I can tell you without preaching to you, from my own experience, that we built two remarkable companies in this town with the public education afforded to us and our group of associates. It is the brain center, the heart of a national company, and a regional company that competes favorably with anybody from MIT, Harvard, Stanford, you pick it. So you have the foundation to pursue the dream.

We have the foundation to pursue the dream and the opportunity is now left up to us. To live the dream and we can't go without saying, this dream, this campus, we're in the middle of a dream that will be lived for the next two hundred years in our community and we're getting to see it now. For years Wright Patman, in his biographical information, in 1949 says the 1st Congressional District is at 70 percent of the educational and median income of the state of Texas. Guess what? When Dr. Hensley put the demographic information together to expand this university part of what we found was that the educational level of the region, the 1st Congressional District of Texas, is at 70 percent because of the access to affordable education. I don't know about you, but without scholarships and without help, I would not have had the opportunity that you're having, that we're having, so it's time to put something back. Now what do we do? We have to put something back because of this gift. Around the house growing up, and I think it came from my grandmother once again. She said, "Life is a lot like baking cookies." When you came in from school the first thing you would go for was the cookie jar. You stayed hungry all the time so the first thing you did was reach in that cookie jar. She said, "At some time in life you're going to have to bake a few cookies. You can't just reach into that jar without putting something back." So I think that's pretty much the way I've tried to live my life. You get out, you work hard, you do your best and you try to give something back. Probably never enough, but at least you make an effort to. So I think it's now our challenge, Dr. Hensley, and our responsibility to bake a few cookies and put something back in the jar. So congratulations once again, I look forward to seeing you around and come back, and let's make this community better than it's ever been. Thank you very much.