



March 4, 2014

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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UDC CELEBRATES THE PAST AND HONORS EXCELLENCE

Washington, DC – Hundreds of faculty, students, alumni and University supporters gathered on the Van Ness Campus for the 37th Founder’s Day Convocation and Awards Program on February 20. The annual event celebrated the institution’s one-hundred sixty-three year history and gave special recognition to five members of the University community who’ve made outstanding contributions through academic excellence, leadership, and community service.

Under the theme, *“Honoring our Legacy, Blazing New Trails”*, the University’s Interim President, James E. Lyons welcomed the near capacity crowd to the Theater of the Arts auditorium and introduced keynote speaker, Dr. George Cooper, Executive Director of the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. As the voice of the HBCU community at the U.S. Department of Education, Cooper helps shape policy and deploys resources from 32 federal agencies that support HBCU’s through federal grants and contracts.

In his message, Dr. Cooper meticulously chronicled the school’s unique history and reminded the audience of the University’s distinctive status as a Congressionally-mandated land grant institution. Cooper challenged students, faculty and administrators to embrace strategic options for innovation and growth, and to capitalize on new opportunities and resources afforded to institutions with land-grant status.

Honored with the Dr. Marjorie Holloman Parker Distinguished Educator’s Award was Dr. April Massey, who currently serves as the University’s Acting Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and has been exemplary in her dedication to the advancement of the University. In accepting the award, Massey expressed deep gratitude for the privilege to serve students whose lives are profoundly changed through the UDC experience.

“I truly believe in this University’s mission to serve marginalized students from under-represented minority populations who might not otherwise receive a college education. It’s more of a calling for me, which means that I take my job very seriously,” she said.

That sense of dedication was echoed by recently retired UDC professor, Dr. Marie M.B. Racine who received the Dr. Paul Phillip Cooke Lifetime Achievement Award for her exceptional loyalty to the University and extraordinary commitment to her students. Boasting a distinguished teaching career of nearly forty-five years, the beloved instructor thanked her many students for their inspiration and praised her teaching colleagues for their continuing support of the institution.

“Through many years of progress and challenging growth there have been some difficult times,” she said. “Whether financial difficulties, program mergers or changes in leadership, the faculty has always been there and have played a critical role in shaping the future. They are the heart and soul of the University and I am proud to have served with them.”

Dr. Alfred O. Taylor, Jr. was the recipient of the Ronald H. Brown Distinguished Leadership Award for thirty-one years of exceptional leadership at the University and in the broader community. In accepting his award, Taylor stated that his early preparation at the Washington Technical Institute and the professional leadership training he received while a graduate student at Federal City College were invaluable to his later success as a University Professor, Department Chairperson and Assistant Dean for the College of Professional Studies.

“When we at look how far we’ve come our past speaks for itself,” he said. “Since the beginning, our progress has been forged by making difficult choices and strategic decisions. From Miner Normal School to DC Teacher’s College and Federal City to UDC, visionary leadership has always been a hallmark of this institution. I’m proud and humbled to be listed among these individuals.”

Carrington Smith was selected as the first recipient of the University’s Distinguished Alumni Award. The retired Prince George’s County, Maryland educator challenged everyone who has been a part of UDC and its predecessor institutions to step up their support of the institution.

“It’s time for us to come home,” Carrington remarked. “It’s time to practice the right kind of mathematics, which calls for addition and multiplication of alumni support.” Carrington said, “This University embodies the rich heritage of our alma maters and is deserving of our collective support.”

As a 30-year veteran of the University’s Office of Public Safety, Lieutenant Donald Whiting was presented with the Dr. Cleveland L. Dennard Distinguished Service Award for his consistency in promoting and upholding the mission and ideals of the University. Whiting was brief in his remarks, but thanked the University for giving him an opportunity to “serve” and reflected on the Founder’s Day theme.

“I’m very proud that the University continues to blaze new trails for innovation and growth,” he said. “It not only honors our legacy, but also serves to celebrate our past.”

In his closing remarks, University President, Dr. Lyons thanked the Founder’s Day honorees for their service and gave tribute to Myrtila Miner and other past leaders who have contributed to the institution’s historic growth. He said that these dedicated people epitomize the very best in higher education.

“They are trailblazers, leaders and service-oriented individuals who are the spirit of our future,” said Lyons. “But above all, they are educators, and each one is deserving of our highest accolades.”

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