

City of Houston's
P S R W
17th Annual Essay Contest

Friday, May 8, 2009

3:00 p.m. Visitors Center is available for arriving honorees and guests.

3:15 Carol Herrera:

Hi, everyone and welcome to the award ceremony honoring the winners in the 17th annual Public Service Recognition Week Essay Contest. There were of 291 essays submitted this year. Some of them were good, some of them were very good, and the five we're honoring here today were the very best. The students who wrote them deserve a hearty congratulations and a round of applause for that.

They wrote about being an airport manager, a firefighter, a neighborhood planner, a dead animal crew member and a sports youth program director. They wrote with compassion about giving back to their community as a public servant, and they shined spotlights on what an important role public servants have in our society.

Now, without further ado, I'd like to introduce you to city controller, and possibly your next mayor, Annise D. Parker. In January, Ms. Parker was sworn in for a third term as the city's 14th city controller. The controller is the second-highest elected city official and the city's chief financial officer. During her first two terms, Ms. Parker helped win voter approval for the Controller's Office to independently conduct performance reviews of all city department, agencies and programs. Mayor Bill White tapped her to serve on the committee overseeing an independent investigation of the city's crime lab, and she helped lead a task force that developed new funding options and policies for solid waste collection.

Before her election as city controller, Ms. Parker served six years as an at-large City Council member. We don't have time to go into all of her accomplishments in that role. Suffice it to say, she knows a thing or two about public service. And, not just as a paid employee. She

also serves on the boards of the Holocaust Museum and Girls Inc. and is an advisory board member of the Houston Zoo, the Montrose Counseling Center and Trees for Houston.

Controller Parker, welcome.

[PARKER to the podium]

3:20 **Controller Parker:**
Talks about the importance of public service and grooming the leaders of tomorrow.

3:25 **Carol:**
Thank you, controller, for taking the time to be here. [If PARKER starts leaving, say something like: You're not going anywhere yet, though, ma'am. You've got to help us hand out the money.]

Let me tell you a little about this competition:

Houston-area high school seniors were given the challenge of writing an essay, 500 words or less, on the topic, "If I were a blank, what a difference I would make." They filled in the blank with their choice of jobs.

As I said before, we received 291 entries. Those were whittled down to the best 26. More than half of those 26 entries were from DeBakey High School for Health Professions. There's some impressive teaching taking place in that school, let me tell you.

Those 26 essays were then judged, anonymously, by a panel of city employees, who scored them according to organization, ideas presented, creativity and grammar.

This contest raises awareness of public service careers among the younger generation. Someday, they'll come to work for the city of Houston, helping create the best workforce staffed with the best and brightest in the community.

By participating in the contest, students also hone useful writing skills that they'll need in college.

Before we honor these outstanding students, who are the future of the workforce, let's recognize the outstanding generosity of the present. Without our sponsors, this contest couldn't be possible. They are:

The Indo-American Charity Foundation and president **Rachel Varghese (Rāchel _____)**.

BlueCross BlueShield of Texas, represented by **Caryn Ayres (Karen Airs)**

United Healthcare, represented by **Shelly Kennedy**.

And Fiesta Mart Stores, represented by **Juanita Elizondo**.

3:35

Carol:

Now, let's get to the awards

1. Our fifth place winner is **Sarah Macalino**, who wrote: "If I Were a Sports Youth Program Director, What a Difference I Would Make."

Sarah, please join us ...

[SARAH to the podium.]

Sarah is graduating from the Michael E. DeBakey High School for Health Professions. A former cross-country runner who enjoys playing piano and dreams of being a doctor, Sarah plans to go to St. Mary's University in San Antonio.

Sarah receives a \$300 scholarship from Fiesta Mart presented by director of corporate donations, **Juanita Elizondo**.

[JUANITA to the podium.

JUANITA presents check to SARAH.

PARKER presents certificate to SARAH.]

[PHOTO: SARAH receives check from Juanita.

PHOTO: SARAH, JUANITA and PARKER.]

[JUANITA and SARAH exit.]

2. Fourth place winner is **Anthony Covarrubias (Anthony _____)**, who wrote: “If I Were a Dead Animal Crew Member, What a Difference I Would Make.”

Hey, I’m glad someone’s offering to do that job.

Anthony, please join us ...

[ANTHONY to the podium.]

Anthony is president of the Austin High School drama club and a member of the science club. He intends to study computer engineering at the University of Houston. I’ve got a stubborn computer that’s about to become roadkill, so you can act out your essay premise while putting your college education to use.

*Anthony will receive a \$400 scholarship from United Healthcare, presented by Shelly Kennedy.

[SHELLY to the podium.

SHELLY presents check to ANTHONY.

PARKER presents certificate to ANTHONY.]

[PHOTO: ANTHONY receiving check from SHELLY.

PHOTO: ANTHONY, SHELLY and PARKER.]

[ANTHONY and SHELLY exit.]

OR

*Anthony will receive a \$400 scholarship from United Healthcare. The company’s representative couldn’t make it today, so Controller Parker will present the check. And before Wayne Dolcefino jumps out from behind one of these close racks, let me reiterate that this is not city money.

[**PARKER** presents check to **ANTHONY**.]

[**PHOTO: ANTHONY** receiving check from **PARKER**.
PHOTO: ANTHONY and **PARKER**.]

[**ANTHONY** exits.]

3. OK, our third-place winner is **Leonard Qin (Leonard _____)**. Leonard wrote, “If I Were a Neighborhood Planner, What a Difference I Would Make.”

Leonard, please join us ...

[**LEONARD** to the podium.]

Leonard is a skilled juggler, yo-yoer and diabolo performer. He’s graduating from the DeBakey High School for Health Professions. He’ll attend Lewis and Clark College in Portland to study anthropology and prepare for a career in academia.

Leonard receives a \$600 scholarship from BlueCross BlueShield of Texas, presented by Caryn Ayers.

[**CARYN** to the podium.

CARYN presents the check to **LEONARD**.

PARKER presents the certificate to **LEONARD**.]

[**PHOTO: LEONARD** receiving check from **CARYN**.
PHOTO: LEONARD, CARYN and **PARKER**.]

[**LUYANG** and **JUANITA** exit.]

4. Second-place winner is **Taylor Morell**. Taylor wrote: “If I Were a Firefighter, What a Difference I Would Make.”

Taylor couldn’t be with us today. But let me tell you a little about her....

Taylor is graduating from Spring High School. She’s been dancing for 16 years and is in Spring FFA and Spring 4H. She’s also a member of

the Spring Volunteer Fire Department, so she was able to do some easy and accurate research for her essay. A Gold Key Award winner, Taylor plans to go to Blinn Junior College before entering a nursing program in the Houston Medical Center to prepare for a career as a labor and delivery nurse.

She receives a \$1,000 scholarship from the Indo-American Charity Foundation. President **Rachel Varghese** will present the award ... which I'll accept on Taylor's behalf.

[**RACHEL** to the podium.
RACHEL presents the check.]

[CAROL put the check in her pocket.] Shhhh. We'll make this our little secret. ... What? I just said I need a new computer. Think I'll get a Mac this time

Anyway, moving on....

5. Our first-place winner is **Geetanjali Gubba** (_____). Geetanjali wrote: "If I Was an Airport Manager, What a Difference I Would Make."

Geetanjali, please join us ...

[**GEETANJALI** to the podium]

Geetanjali, a senior at William B. Travis High School, is active amongst both the Indian and American communities. She is founder and president of the Mu Alpha Theta Math Honor Society, science club treasurer, member of the National Honor Society, NASA High School Aerospace Scholar, and a member of the Academic Decathlon team. She will attend Olin College of Engineering in Massachusetts.

Geetanjali will receive a \$2,000 scholarship from the Indo-American Charity Foundation... president **Rachel Varghese** will, again, present the award.

[**RACHEL** presents check to **GEETANJALI**.
PARKER presents certificate to **GEETANJALI**.]

[PHOTO: **GEETANJALI** receiving the check from **MANI**.
PHOTO: **PATTY, MANI** and **RODRIGUEZ**.]

[**GEETANJALI** and **RACHEL** exit podium.]

Now, if **Juanita** will join us up here again, Fiesta Mart has a couple more checks to give.

[**JUANITA** to the podium.]

One is \$350 to Travis High School for being the first-place winner's school. Teacher **Luke Chauvin (Luke Show Van)** will use that to enrich his students' classroom experience.

Unfortunately, Mr. Chauvin could not be here today. Again, I'll gladly accept the check on his behalf. [CAROL puts check into a pocket with the other check.] Yesss, I'm that much closer to buying that computer.

Fiesta is also donating a check for \$350 to The Michael E. DeBakey High School for Health Professions for having the most essays advance to the final round of judging.

Accepting are Principal **Linda Lazenby** and teacher **Margo Hicks**.

Please join us, Ms. Lazenby and Ms. Hicks.

[**LAZENBY** and **HICKS** to podium.]

[**JUANITA** presents check to **LAZENBY** and **HICKS**.]

[PHOTO: **LAZENBY** and **HICKS** receive check from **JUANITA**.
PHOTO: **LAZENBY**, t **HICKS**, **JUANITA** and Hick's
STUDENTS.]

[They exit.]

You know, I think both teachers here deserve a round of applause. Both have really given their students a leg up going into college. I'm

not just talking about the money. That's nice, but even better is the writing skills these teachers are imparting to their students.

And, of course, congratulations to all our winners and their schools.

Well, folks, that's it. Unless there's someone else giving out money. No? Then this brings the presentations to a close. You are all invited to enjoy the hospitality of the Visitors Center with refreshments provided by Fiesta Mart.

4:00

END.