REMARKS BY PRESIDENT G. WAYNE CLOUGH

GEORGIA TECH COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY, AUGUST 1999

It is my pleasure to welcome everyone to Georgia Tech's two-hundred fourth commencement exercises.

As someone who has "gotten out" but never gotten over my love of Georgia Tech, it always gives me great pleasure to preside over Commencement and to welcome another class of Georgia Tech alumni.

Today, you join the thousands of Georgia Tech alumni who have gone before you. Like those who have gone before, you carry with you vivid memories of this Institute and its traditions. Memories of pulling all-nighters studying for exams, enjoying the Ramblin' Wreck Parade, and cheering the Jackets on cool, crisp fall nights in Bobby Dodd Stadium. Like those who graduated before you, you will always know that "the Hill" has nothing to do with our nation's Capitol, and that the Rose Bowl Field is not located in California, but in Georgia. And, finally, like the rest of Georgia Tech's alumni, you have learned not only calculus, physics, management, computing and engineering, but you have also learned to appreciate the culinary delights of a Varsity chili dog and Junior's specialty, a great hamburger and an order of fries.

In your years at Georgia Tech, you've learned and experienced much, but you have not done it alone. With you every step of the way – at least in spirit – were your parents and your spouses, who made all the difference in your success. The faculty and staff of Georgia Tech and our graduates would like to thank you for your support. Would our parents and spouses please stand so that we may recognize you.

(APPLAUSE)

Additional support for our graduates came from the Georgia Tech faculty. Now there may have been times when you got a paper back with lots of red ink on it, and you had temporary doubts, but your graduation today is a sign that was just a form of constructive criticism. So now is the time for all of our graduates to say thanks to all the help they received over time from the faculty and I would like to ask the entire faculty present today to rise and be recognized.

(APPLAUSE)

Of course, those who deserve the most recognition on this momentous day are the graduates, who entered this room as students and who will leave as Georgia Tech alumni. Would all of you please stand so that we may recognize you and your achievement?

(LEAD APPLAUSE)

It is a Georgia Tech tradition that the faculty member who has been chosen as Distinguished Professor for the preceding academic year has the honor of delivering the summer commencement address. This year the recipient of that high honor is Dr. James C. Powers, Regents Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry.

Jim Powers is the "founding father" of biochemistry at Georgia Tech. He got his PhD in organic chemistry from MIT, then served on the faculties of UCLA and the University of Washington before arriving here in 1970 as the very first professor in the new biochemistry program Tech was hoping to start. At the time, there was some doubt as to whether biochemistry would actually develop into a discipline, but everyone agreed that if it didn't, Dr. Powers would still be an excellent addition to the chemistry faculty.

However, Jim worked tirelessly to develop this new discipline at both the undergraduate and the graduate level. He expanded both the courses and the faculty, and the program's strength as a discipline today is due to his efforts. Any recognition of Georgia Tech's expertise in biochemistry is due, at least in part, to some 140 articles Jim Powers has had published in refereed journals.

His students, from undergraduates to post-doctoral fellows, are unanimous in their praise for him. They will tell you that he demands excellence, but at the same time he is deeply concerned that they understand the material. He has a reputation for making his lectures interesting, for making the most complicated subjects understandable, and for being willing to answer all questions.

In addition to being the "father of biochemistry" at Georgia Tech, Professor Powers is also known to Tech students as "the mountain goat in biochemist's clothing." Through Outdoor Recreation Georgia Tech, he has led groups of up to 20 students on backpacking trips all across the nation that have ranged from weekends to three weeks in length. He is an experienced mountaineer and a certified ice and snow climber. Students rank mountain climbing with him as the ultimate outdoor experience Georgia Tech has to offer.

Next year Dr. Powers will celebrate his 30th anniversary at Georgia Tech. He is loved and revered by students and faculty as Regents Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry and as "mountain goat extraordinare." Whether he is in the classroom and on the trail, he is an inspiration to his students, and they all know he genuinely cares about them.

We are proud to honor him as our Distinguished Professor of the Year, and at this time I am pleased to introduce him to deliver a few final words of advice to you before you leave this campus for the next chapter of your lives.

AFTER THE PRESENTATION OF DEGREES:

Near the close of the 1800s, a young man sent a sheaf of poems to the foremost American writer of the day to be critiqued. Ralph Waldo Emerson read the manuscript, which was entitled "Leaves of Grass" and was destined to become one of America's best-loved volumes of poetry. And he wrote back to the young Walt Whitman: "I greet you at the beginning of a great career."

And as I look out over this sea of newly minted young Georgia Tech alumni, I echo his words. I greet you at the beginning of a great career. There has never been a better time to have earned a Georgia Tech degree.

Every year across this nation colleges and universities hand out a million undergraduate degrees. At some of those schools, the best advice a commencement speaker could give is not to pierce or tattoo any part of their anatomy that cannot be covered for a job interview. But you stand out from among that million.

You stand out by virtue of the name of the Institute on your diploma. Georgia Tech ranks in the top tier of those colleges and universities by any measure, and 22 of Georgia Tech's schools, colleges and programs are ranked in the top 20 in the nation in their respective categories.

You stand out by virtue of the subjects you studied. Talent is the key to the success of today's technology-based businesses. As that great American philosopher Casey Stengel once said, "90 percent of this game is two-thirds mental."

But you also stand out by virtue of the real meaning of the education you have received here. Someone once said that your true education is what is left after you have forgotten everything you learned in the classroom. Beyond engineering and economics, beyond calculus and computing, you leave Georgia Tech having learned how to rise to a challenge… how to be creative in solving a problem… how not only to adapt to change, but to anticipate it and even provoke it. These abilities are your true education and will stand you in good stead your whole life long.

But what I hope most of all, is that you have learned to seek and find that critical balance where, in the words of Lyndon Johnson, "the meaning of our lives matches the marvelous products of our labor."

Technology, for all its wonders, is a double-edged sword. It has given us automobiles, airplanes, television and computers. Byproducts of these inventions include traffic jams, flight delays, air pollution and mindless, sometimes debasing entertainment. The challenge for you and your generation is to go beyond merely multiplying the number of things that people can use, and leverage the benefits of technology for the good of all… to help us "be more" rather than simply "have more."

The young Winston Churchill once asked Mark Twain to autograph one of his books with a bit of wisdom. With his usual wit, Twain obliged, writing, "To do good is noble. To teach others to do good is nobler, and less trouble."

As you move forward into the next phase of your lives, I urge you to take his advice... both to do good yourself and to teach others to do good… because from now on, you are no longer merely students. You are the technological leaders of tomorrow… and the role models and teachers of future generations.