

Dr. Peterson
When the Whistle Blows

Tuesday, April 2, 2013

Thank you, Jasmine. I want to extend a warm welcome to all of the family members and friends of the faculty, staff, and students we are honoring today.

We join with all of you in celebrating their lives and the many contributions they have made to Georgia Tech.

Just as they were part of your families and circle of friends, they were an important part of our campus community, and all of us here at Georgia Tech share your sense of loss. Seven of those whom we remember were faculty and staff who devoted their lives to educating students, conducting research to improve the quality of life, and keeping the Institute running.

Three of them were students, interacting with faculty, staff, and other students, and partnering with us in the process of learning and discovery. They studied in the buildings around us and were involved in student activities. And our sense of the unrealized potential that has been lost with their lives is especially keen.

What is important for us today is to think about the personal memories we can see so clearly in the mirror of our minds – memories of good times together; memories of teaching and learning; memories of service rendered to their families, to the Institute, and to the Tech community; memories of smiles and laughter, kindness and caring.

The lives of some of those we honor today were a brief candle, while for others, life was a longer journey. But we value the special relationship we had with each of them, and we carry their memory in our hearts, today and in the future.

We began this special ceremony thirteen years ago to celebrate the contributions of those who passed away while they were actively enrolled or employed at Georgia Tech. Each year in April, we remember them, celebrate their lives, and salute them with the Georgia Tech Whistle.

The Whistle is an old factory steam whistle that has been an integral part of life here at Tech for more than a century. It is both a source and a symbol of some of our most valued traditions. We get up by the Whistle, and it keeps us on schedule throughout the day, blowing at five minutes before each hour to signal the change of classes.

Beyond these daily blasts marking the hour, we blow the Whistle on two occasions. The first is to celebrate special events, like when the Yellow Jackets win on Grant Field, or when a philanthropy campaign reaches its successful conclusion.

The second is this annual ceremony of remembrance to honor those active members of the Tech community who passed away during the past twelve months. Today, we continue that tradition.

In our regular, daily routine, the final blast of the Whistle sounds at five minutes before six o'clock in the evening. Then the Whistle falls silent until five minutes before seven the next morning. Today, we will conclude our memorial service by breaking that silence. Ten blasts will commemorate each one of the individuals we remember and honor today.

Then an eleventh blast will sound in tribute to the alumni, retired faculty and staff, and friends of Georgia Tech who passed away during the past year.

When the Whistle resumes its regular schedule tomorrow morning at five minutes before seven, those routine blasts will have a deeper meaning for each one of us.

Each time the Whistle sounds in the days to come, it will be a reminder of these students, faculty, and staff whom we hold close in our memories.

We are also going to light a candle in memory of those individuals whose families are either here with us or have given us permission to honor their memory in this way. We know that the light from the contributions they made to Georgia Tech and to their families and friends will continue to shine on our campus and in our lives.

At this time, I am going to light the unity candle, representing the collective spirit of the Georgia Tech family of which they were a part and to which they contributed.

Dr. Rafael Bras, provost and executive vice president of academic affairs, and Eran Mordel, Mr. Georgia Tech will read the names of those we are honoring.