

REMARKS BY GEORGIA TECH PRESIDENT G. WAYNE CLOUGH
"When the Whistle Blows" Commemorative Service
April 17, 2002

I would like to welcome all of you to this solemn ceremony of remembrance to pay tribute to the members of our Georgia Tech campus community who were lost to us during the course of the past year.

I have always maintained that the essence of Georgia Tech's greatness is not bricks and mortar, but people. And this evening we remember and pay tribute to 11 valued members of the Georgia Tech family who died during the past year while enrolled or employed at Georgia Tech. They include six students, who brightened our classrooms and were partners with us in the process of learning and discovery. They include four members of our staff, who kept all the cog wheels turning, enabling our programs and our campus to keep moving forward. And they include a much-loved member of the faculty who was an acclaimed scientist and engineer. In addition, we remember a former president who served this institution from 1957 until 1969 and continued to grace our campus on frequent occasions over the years since then.

These active members of our campus community left us in many ways. Some fought valiantly against disease, holding death at bay while they pursued the things they loved here among us. They could have complained about the cards they were dealt, but instead they concentrated on playing well with the hand they held. We admire their spirit and celebrate what they were able to accomplish in the face of their illness. They taught us much about what it means to live.

Others - and this group includes most of the students we lost - were struck down unexpectedly, tragic victims of deadly accidents or the abrupt and unexpected failure of their own bodies. They were gone in a flash, and we are stunned by the suddenness of losing them.

All of them were valued members of the Georgia Tech community and an important part of our lives. The poet Edna St. Vincent Millay wrote these words in a letter to someone she loved and missed, "Where you used to be, there is a hole in the world, which I find myself constantly walking around in the daytime, and falling into at night."

We can say the same thing about the loved ones we remember this evening. Their departure tore a hole in the fabric of our personal lives and our campus life here at

Georgia Tech. And our daily routines are now full of painful encounters with the hole where they used to be.

We miss them, and we are saddened by the loss of each one. This evening we pause to honor the memory of each one, to pay tribute to their contributions to our campus community, and to express our thanks for the time we spent with them and the ways they touched our lives. And in the process, we will hopefully find a sense of peace and healing for our grief at their loss.

Abraham Lincoln said, "In the end, it is not the years in your life that count. It is the life in your years." Many of the students, faculty, and staff we remember this evening were not destined to have long years on this Earth, but we remember them for the life in the years they were given. We remember them for what they meant to us on a personal level and as an integral part of the Georgia Tech family. What counts for us today is the personal memories we can still see so clearly in the mirror of our minds – memories of good times together here on campus, memories of smiles and laughter, of kindness and caring.

A sense of their presence still lingers in the classrooms and labs and workplaces they inhabited just a few short months ago, and reminds us of the ways in which they contributed to the fabric of life here on campus. The many small caring and helpful things they did day by day changed us for the better and helped to make our campus community and this institution a better place.

We also pay tribute to a former president who not only positioned Georgia Tech for the heights we have reached today, but was beloved by students at a time when college students on many campuses were not thinking kindly of administrators. As president during the 1960s, Ed Harrison presided over the peaceful integration of Georgia Tech, oversaw a major expansion of our campus, and set higher standards for admission and academics.

But those of us who were students while he was president remember him for smaller things – for his open meetings with students and for the day he cancelled classes to celebrate the basketball team's second victory over mighty Kentucky in a season when victories were hard to come by.

In his poem "Hallowed Ground," Thomas Campbell wrote, "To live in the hearts we leave behind is not to die." These members of our community still live in the hearts of the family and friends who are gathered here. Our lives are richer because we had the opportunity to know them, and we will always hold them close in memory.

The Georgia Tech Whistle is an old factory steam whistle that has been an integral part of life here on campus for more than 100 years. It is both a source and a symbol of our

most valued traditions. We get up by the whistle, and it keeps us on schedule throughout the day, as it blows at five minutes before the hour, signaling the change of classes.

We also blow the whistle to commemorate special events, like when the Yellow Jackets win on Grant Field, or when our centennial campaign reached its successful conclusion, or when Tech Professor Vernon Crawford was named chancellor of the University System of Georgia. These have been special celebrations in the life of our campus.

Last year we added a new tradition to the list. On April 18, 2001, at our first Remembrance Ceremony, the whistle blew in tribute to the lives of the active members of the Georgia Tech community who had passed away during the prior year. Today we continue that tradition as a formal and solemn way to acknowledge the contribution made by 11 members of our community to our life together on this campus and say farewell to them, and to salute a former president.

The final blast in the whistle's regular daily routine sounds at five minutes before six each evening. After that, the whistle falls silent until five minutes before seven the next morning. Tonight we are going to break that silence by sending twelve blasts floating on the evening air in memory of these lives that had special meaning to us.

And when the whistle resumes its regular schedule of blowing at five minutes before the hour tomorrow morning, those routine blasts will have a deeper meaning for each of us. Each time the whistle sounds in the days to come, it will continue to remind us of those we love and have lost, but who still live in our hearts and who we still hold close in memory.