

# Visionary

Annual Publication 2007

## *Charting a Course for Excellence*



**Margaret and Jack  
GUISTWHITE**  
Set an Example  
for a New Generation

**PHI THETA KAPPA®**  
International Honor Society  
of the Two-Year College





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## Visionary 2007

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**On the Cover:** Margaret and Jack Guistwhite, seated, with Phi Theta Kappa alumni (from left) Perla Alzate, Angelica “Angel” Bruno and Matthugh Bennett, on the campus of Florida Atlantic University. Photo by Mardie Banks

The purpose of Phi Theta Kappa shall be to recognize and encourage scholarship among two-year college students. To achieve this purpose, Phi Theta Kappa shall provide opportunity for the development of leadership and service, for an intellectual climate for exchange of ideas and ideals, for lively fellowship for scholars, and for stimulation of interest in continuing academic excellence.

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# "IT IS NOT FROM OURSELVES THAT WE LEARN TO BE BETTER THAN WE ARE."

*Wendell Berry*  
Poet and Author

## *Charting a Course for Excellence*



Rod A. Risley

PHOTO BY TOM ROSTER

In Phi Theta Kappa, we share a passion for excellence in order to become better. Just as one spends a lifetime searching for the meaning of life through the pursuit of truths, the quest for excellence is a pursuit that knows no final destination. Value is found in the journey itself.

While our members vary in age and circumstance – some have just finished high school and others are retraining for second careers – they all share the common quest of pursuing excellence. We seek to help them chart a course for excellence that will guide them throughout their lives.

In this issue of *Visionary*, you will read about inspiring examples of those in our Phi Theta Kappa family whose individual pursuits of excellence not only changed their own lives, but profoundly impacted the lives of others – individuals like Dr. Jack Guistwhite, who planted the seed that resulted in hundreds of four-year colleges designating transfer scholarships for thousands of Phi Theta Kappa members. You will read about Phi Theta Kappa's 2006 Distinguished Alumna, Mirta Ojito, who came to the United States during the Mariel Boatlift from Cuba. Ojito, one of the first-ever

recipients of a Phi Theta Kappa transfer scholarship, later became a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. You will learn how Phi Theta Kappa members as well as chapters utilized international Society programs to transform their local communities while overcoming tremendous personal challenges.

These remarkable souls have come to the realization that life is more meaningful when they are engaged in the pursuit of excellence. All these individuals have learned that life is fluid, filled with events and circumstances that demand decisions about the unfamiliar. Excellence, for them, serves as a reliable compass point to guide in the selection of new paths to walk and stations to pass through.

By pursuing excellence and engaging in Phi Theta Kappa programs, our members are preparing for lives as scholars. What should be the life of a scholar? Perhaps Theodore Roosevelt says it best, "...scholarship is of worth chiefly when it is productive, when the scholar not merely receives or acquires, but gives." Our aim is to help Phi Theta Kappa members prepare to make informed decisions about their lives, which ultimately impact those they serve.

Thus, the worth of education and the work of Phi Theta Kappa lie in preparing individuals to make informed decisions about paths to choose. It is also our responsibility as an organization to increase the number of paths from which our students may choose.

~ Phi Theta Kappa Executive Director Rod A. Risley



# Students Helping Students

“Our chapter has really embraced the service hallmark of Phi Theta Kappa as our community needs us and we want to be a part of New Orleans’ rebirth.”

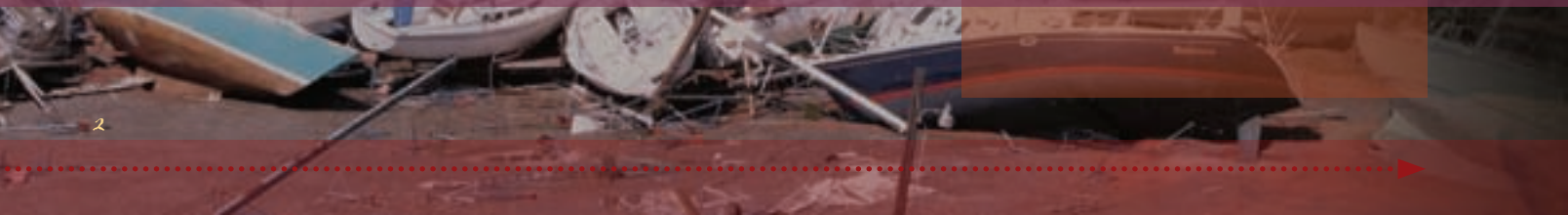
*Emily Gospar*

## SUPPORT LOCAL CHAPTERS AND REGIONS

Phi Theta Kappa chapters are making a difference in communities all around the world, and they need your help! For more information on how you can support local chapters and regions, contact Director of Institutional Advancement Dr. Nancy Rieves at 1.800.946.9995, ext. 3537, or [nancy.rieves@ptk.org](mailto:nancy.rieves@ptk.org).



Delgado students help with campus cleanup and remove debris left by Hurricane Katrina.





# Visionary

People worldwide responded to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, the massive storm that decimated New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005. Phi Theta Kappa's response was *Students Helping Students*, an effort specifically aimed at providing relief to students at the most severely-affected community colleges: Delgado and Nunez in Louisiana, and Mississippi Gulf Coast, Jones and Pearl River in Mississippi.

Phi Theta Kappa chapters rallied to replace school supplies, arrange for housing and in some cases help students transfer. After personal visits to the area, Society representatives determined the greatest need was to provide tuition assistance. Society members collected almost \$60,000 in this effort. The following letter from Emily Cosper, advisor at Delgado Community College in New Orleans, is an account of one chapter's experience in the hurricane aftermath.

## *An Open Letter* from Delgado Community College in New Orleans

To the many students across the world who contributed to the Phi Theta Kappa *Students Helping Students* Hurricane Katrina Relief effort, your generosity and support for Delgado Community College in New Orleans is greatly appreciated. Because of you, many students were given much-needed help in the face of seemingly insurmountable difficulties.

It is difficult to fathom what our city was like in the days, weeks, and months following Hurricane Katrina. Even those of us who live here have a hard time comprehending the tragedy that took so many lives and left our city in shambles. But the one constant during this entire event has been the kindness of so many people from around this country and the world. We still have a long way to go, but our difficult journey is made a bit more palatable knowing that so many people have us in their hearts. For this, our college is very grateful.

When the hurricane devastated our city and scattered us across the country, Charlie Bellone, then Delgado's chapter advisor, and his assistant, Kim Russell, began to contact chapter members and see what kind of assistance they might need. At this time, there was still little information available about our college as the city was still on lockdown, phone service was non-existent, and transportation difficult.

Unfortunately, our college was devastated by the storm and we would not return until January 2006. We came back to a much different campus, a campus that sat in floodwaters for about three weeks. One of the most heartbreaking sights was the pile of soggy books stacked outside of the library. We lost our Phi Theta Kappa office and with it over 30 years of records, awards and memories. We lost our student services building that housed financial aid, the registrar, and a math and science high school. We lost our math building and a state-of-the-art computer lab. We lost offices and books and years of work. We lost students and faculty members and for a brief while, we lost a sense of home.

All the while, Charlie and Kim were working hard to keep our chapter alive. Sadly, for the Delgado community and our chapter, the hurricane was only the beginning of our tragedies. On Christmas Eve, 2005, Charlie Bellone died of a massive heart attack. I cannot describe to

you what a sense of loss we all felt upon hearing this news. Charlie embraced the mission of Phi Theta Kappa and encouraged his students (and his colleagues) to be the best they could be. He had spent seven years encouraging, cajoling, pushing, supporting, and loving his students as their Phi Theta Kappa advisor. His colleagues and his students were devastated. It was another loss after so many others.

I had worked closely with Charlie over the years and knew about Phi Theta Kappa and truly believed in all that it offered students. I volunteered to be the advisor and have spent a year learning my way with Kim Russell's help. It has not always been easy, especially the Spring 2006 semester. We had no office phones until the summer; the mail was still not functioning regularly; and our student population had decreased by about 30 percent. A sense of confusion and sadness still permeated our city and our college and our students' lives, but Kim and I worked hard to keep our chapter going.

We participated in our Campus Cleanup Day where more than 100 faculty, staff, and students, including about 20 Phi Theta Kappa members, came to campus on a Saturday morning to help pick up trash, to weed the overgrown beds, and plant flowers. This was a psychological boost for all of us – in the midst of the construction and devastation, our campus was once again sparkling.

We also inducted 30 new members – nothing to compare with our last induction before the storm, when 150 eligible students accepted membership – but to us this was a renaissance. We celebrated our students' accomplishments in the face of tremendous adversity.

Each semester is easier and our chapter slowly, but surely, is rebounding, like our city.

None of us will ever forget all that we lost on August 29, 2005, but we will always be honored to have worked with students who have overcome so much. It is an honor to be affiliated with an organization like Phi Theta Kappa. Delgado Community College cannot thank you enough for all of your support this last year.

~ Emily Cosper, Advisor, Delgado Community College



Charlie Bellone

Phi Theta Kappa promotes student development through opportunities for service and civic engagement. Partnering with an international agency in a two-year service program allows the Society to focus its army of volunteers and considerable information resources toward a unified goal. The current International Service Program is *Operation Green: Improving Our Communities*, a partnership with Keep America Beautiful and its global affiliates in the United Kingdom and around the world.

## Florida Chapter Leads *Operation Green* Efforts



On a sunny Florida day in late 2006, members of Phi Theta Kappa at Valencia Community College's West Campus gathered with other Keep America Beautiful volunteers to construct a new neighborhood park and playground.

The chapter's work with the Society's 2006-2008 International Service Program, *Operation Green: Improving Our Communities*, put them in the spotlight during 2006.

The chapter has been so successful working with "Operation Green" initiatives that Phi Theta Kappa's International Service Program partner, Keep America Beautiful, invited chapter president Kerry Anderson to share information about their projects during the organization's 2006 National Conference held December 6-9 in Orlando.

Following Phi Theta Kappa's 2006 International Convention, where the "Operation Green" program was launched, Anderson attended a meeting with Jane Ferry, the Regional Keep America Beautiful Coordinator. During the meeting the group put together four main areas of concentration for Florida, including:

**Graffiti Removal** - Ferry said people often report graffiti to her office, but she lacks the resources to remove it. Valencia's Phi Theta Kappa members are working with the local chapter of Keep America Beautiful and the Orlando Mayor's office to start a graffiti removal program. Plans are to develop a volunteer team drawn from all four Valencia campus chapters, who will rotate the monthly duty of removing any graffiti that has been reported to Keep America Beautiful.

**10,000 Trees** - While the Phi Theta Kappa

International Officers challenged members to plant 2,007 trees by the 2007 International Convention, the Valencia chapter also decided to work toward a tree-planting goal specific to Florida. The "Plant 10,000 Trees" campaign was developed after four hurricanes hit Florida and the Gulf Coast states in 2004. Florida alone lost an estimated 20,000 trees that summer, and this campaign is an effort to combat that loss.

**Adopt a Stop** - The chapter is working with the local public bus system to adopt at least one and possibly two bus stations near the school campus. Members will be cleaning up the area and making sure the bus stops are free of graffiti and litter.

**Recycling** - The chapter has also started a used cellular phone and ink cartridge drive on campus. Used cartridges are donated to Habitat For Humanity to help rebuild homes in the hurricane-devastated Gulf Coast area.

The heavy community involvement and participation in regional and international programs has paid off. In 2006 the Valencia chapter's honors included election as Florida Executive Chapter, being named Florida's Most Distinguished Chapter and winning a Beta Alpha Continued Excellence Hallmark Award at the Society's International Convention in Seattle, Washington.

So what's the secret to their "Operation Green" accomplishments and achievements as a chapter?

"Excellence is attained not necessarily from planning or just 'happenstance.' It is often achieved by a great group of people who have a common idea, goal, or plan and are willing to work together to attain it," said Laura Gaylor, the chapter's Senator of Finance.

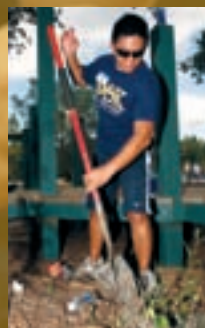




PHOTOS BY GRACE MACK

**“We, as a chapter, do our best to have a goal – whether it is to raise money or show by example how we can help our community and in doing so the path we travel teaches us some of life’s greatest lessons.”**

*Laura Gayser*  
Phi Theta Kappa Chapter Officer





Phi Theta Kappa's Project Graduation will celebrate its fifth birthday as a Society-wide civic engagement initiative this year, but chapter members around the world will not be content with cakes and candles. Instead they will keep collecting the thousands of non-perishable food items and books to help stock local food pantries and literacy agencies, meeting needs in their own communities while commemorating one of the most important milestones in their lives.

## THE FORD COLLEGE STUDENT PURCHASE PROGRAM

has provided financial support as a sponsor of Project Graduation since 2003. Since Phi Theta Kappa adopted Project Graduation as a civic engagement initiative, the program has provided 307,666 food items and 252,567 books to needy persons around the world.



Members, graduates and their families pitch in to make Project Graduation a success.





# Happy Birthday, Project Graduation: International Civic Engagement Initiative Turns Five

Project Graduation was conceived in 1998 at Burlington County College in New Jersey, as an opportunity for graduates to give back to the community while celebrating their new beginnings inherent in commencement ceremonies. Graduates and commencement guests were asked to bring a can of food and a children's book. The first food items collected for Project Graduation went to local food banks while the books were given to the America Reads Challenge, at that time Phi Theta Kappa's International Service Program.

In 1999, Phi Theta Kappa chapters at Burlington County College and Delaware County Community College in Pennsylvania developed, coordinated, and promoted this program to Society chapters nationally. The Society assumed responsibility for the program three years later. Currently Project Graduation is among Phi Theta Kappa's civic engagement initiatives.

In the program's initial year as an international initiative, 283 chapters enrolled. In just one year that number more than doubled, and donations increased by 250 percent. In 2004, Project Graduation reached more than 500 communities and increased donations by 109 percent. By 2005, participation had expanded into 48 states, Canada, Germany, and Guam, and enterprising chapter members were beginning to collect donations at induction ceremonies, orientations and regional meetings in addition to graduations.

One of the founders of Project Graduation was the late Dr. Carole Gavin, longtime Phi Theta Kappa chapter advisor at Burlington County College. Dr. Gavin - whom BCC President Dr. Robert Messina called the most dedicated teacher he had observed during his 20 years at the college - lost a long battle with cancer in February 2007.

Dr. Gavin always credited chapter officers for Project Graduation's initial success, including two who later became International Officers - 1999-2000 New England/Middle States Vice President Wade Hale and 2000-2001 International President Heidi White.

"Dr. Gavin impacted so many lives and left a remarkable legacy. Even though she no longer is with us in the physical sense her memory lives on, in Project

Graduation, by the people she will continue to touch through the program's efforts," White said. "Dr. Gavin was never interested in the limelight; she was driven to make a difference in everyone and everything she touched. She succeeded in her mission. She will be missed," said White.

"I remember sitting in the chapter meeting, not quite ten years ago when Dr. Gavin relayed a dream to those of us in the room. Little did she know that anyone would take her thoughts of donations at graduation and run with them," said Hale, who now serves as Deputy County Clerk for Burlington County.

"The officer team really got the project off the ground. It grew a little each year in the region after that. It wasn't until a few years later that Heidi picked it back up and ran even further with it, putting Project Graduation on its present course. We all knew it was a worthy project, but in the earliest stages, we never dreamed it would grow to its current scope," said Hale.

"The first year, I didn't truly understand the scope of just how far the program would expand. By the second year, I knew it was a home run. When you have a program that is a win-win for everyone, how can it fail?" recalled White, currently a national accounts team member for the Campbell Soup Company.

"I remember one night we were up until 4:00 a.m. working on the initial website. On the first page of the site, when Project Graduation hadn't even lifted off the ground we wrote, 'Sign up today and become a part of this historic, national initiative.' We laughed at ourselves as we wrote those words. Although no one else had heard about the program, we believed in our hearts that it was only a matter of time. We were dreaming big."

"The part of Project Graduation that drove me was that education is a privilege and hopefully we use it in ways that make a difference in the world. Through our contributions on that final day at commencement, Project Graduation becomes a small reminder that by working together, we can make a difference," White said.

"I'm thrilled to know that Project Graduation continues to gain momentum. It's a project that has endless possibilities."



# Guistwhites

## Set an Example of Excellence for a

# New Generation

**"The journey of your life is very important and in thinking about the future, your destination is important as well. So many younger people don't appear to have any goals, but Phi Theta Kappa members are different."**

*Margaret Guistwhite*



PHOTO BY MARIE BANKS

## GUISTWHITE SCHOLAR PROGRAM

The purpose of this merit-based program is to enhance Phi Theta Kappa members' attainment of baccalaureate degrees and to recognize the scholarly achievements. Twenty qualifying students will receive scholarships of \$5,000 each, for completion of baccalaureate degrees. To be eligible, a student must post a minimum 3.5 cumulative GPA and must graduate with an associate degree.

❖ In 2007 20 Guistwhite Scholars were selected.

❖ Guistwhite Scholarships are funded in part by the Society's MBNA credit card program (now Bank of America).

For more information about how you may help fund the Guistwhite Scholars Program, or establish a scholarship program, contact Director of Institutional Advancement Dr. Nancy Rieves at 1.800.946.9995, ext. 3537, or [nancy.rieves@ptk.org](mailto:nancy.rieves@ptk.org).

Jack and Margaret Guistwhite with Florida Atlantic University President Frank Brogan, center



Margaret and Jack Guistwhite still visit the campus of their beloved Florida Atlantic University, where the Phi Theta Kappa alumni members flock to see them.

These students know that the Guistwhites are largely responsible for making it possible for them and for many other Phi Theta Kappa members to complete baccalaureate degrees – because more than 30 years ago, while an administrator at Florida Atlantic University, Dr. Jack Guistwhite established the first-ever transfer scholarship offered exclusively to a member of Phi Theta Kappa.

“I remember in the old days, Executive Director Rod Risley used to have me get up and present the Florida Atlantic scholarship at the International Convention, because it was the only one,” he said., “Afterward I would have all kinds of people ask how Florida Atlantic was able to do this. I would tell them, and things just grew from there.”

Other four-year colleges and universities followed Florida Atlantic University's lead, and today Phi Theta Kappa now boasts an ever-growing transfer scholarship partnership with more than 600 institutions of higher learning offering over \$36 million in transfer scholarship to Society members.

“A Phi Theta Kappa transfer scholarship enabled me to continue my college education in Public Administration. The Phi Theta Kappa alumni chapter is also is a great place to make friends and have a more meaningful college experience,” said FAU student Beth Higgins.

While Dr. Guistwhite originated the concept of the scholarship opportunity for Phi Theta Kappa members, he is quick to credit the role of his college administrators in making the scholarship happen.

“I never could have done it without the support of our college administrators,” he said. “And of course the support of administrators is crucial to scholarship development today.”

A native of New Cumberland, Pennsylvania, Dr. Guistwhite attended the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. He moved to Florida in 1939 to work in a business owned by relatives, and in 1941 enrolled as a junior in the College of Business at the University of Florida. But fate intervened, and after the attack on Pearl Harbor he withdrew from the University and enlisted in the U.S. Army.

He graduated from the Transportation Corps Officer Candidate School as a 2nd Lieutenant, spent two years in the European Theatre and separated from active duty in 1946 with the rank of Captain. He continued in the reserve with a Mobilization Assignment in the Office of Transportation in the Pentagon until 1966 and retired with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 1977.

After the war he returned to the University of Florida, graduated in 1947 with a bachelor of science degree in business administration and joined the staff of the university registrar. In 1963 Dr. Guistwhite was invited to be a part of creating a new institution, Florida Atlantic

University, which opened its doors in 1964.

“What it finally came down to was, how many chances do you get to be in on building something from the ground up?” Dr. Guistwhite said of the decision to move to Boca Raton and accept the new position.

At FAU he also served as Community College Relations Officer, the first in the State University System, a position that put him in touch with community college students – Phi Theta Kappa members in particular. These contacts led him to establish the FAU/Phi Theta Kappa Scholarship Program, become the charter advisor of Alpha of Florida, one of the first Phi Theta Kappa university-based alumni chapters in the Society, and Florida's first Alumni Regional Coordinator. He was also a member of Phi Theta Kappa's National Alumni Council, a forerunner of the Alumni Advisory Council.

Dr. Guistwhite retired on December 31, 1982, after more than 35 years in the Florida State University System. Along the way he had earned master's and doctoral degrees and garnered numerous campus and community honors. At the time of his retirement he was Director of Inter-Institutional Relations for FAU.

He was named an International Honorary Member of Phi Theta Kappa in 1975. Dr. Guistwhite remained active in Phi Theta Kappa until 1989, when he was named Alumni Regional Coordinator Emeritus at the International Convention in recognition of his years of service to the Society.

Phi Theta Kappa further honored the Guistwhites by naming the Guistwhite Scholar Program, which provides funds for baccalaureate studies, in their honor. The first class of Guistwhite Scholars was announced at the 1992 Phi Theta Kappa International Convention in Washington, D.C.

Currently Phi Theta Kappa selects 20 Guistwhite Scholars annually, who each receive \$5,000 scholarships. Almost 300 Phi Theta Kappa members have received Guistwhite awards since the program's inception.

The Guistwhites have given a deferred gift of \$500,000 in the form of a life insurance policy to support the Guistwhite Scholar Program. Being able to help so many students achieve their educational goals has been an important part of Dr. Guistwhite's life.

Dr. and Mrs. Guistwhite say that over the years they have been amazed as they read profiles of the students who have been selected as recipients of the scholarships carrying their name. They continue to enjoy receiving letters of thanks and occasionally meeting Guistwhite Scholar recipients.

“They enrolled at a community college, they got involved with Phi Theta Kappa and now they're doing things for other people; they think of something other than themselves,” Dr. Guistwhite said.

“Margaret and I unfortunately never had any children, but we consider these Guistwhite Scholars from all over the country to be part of our family.”





Keri Szymanski

## **\$36 MILLION IN TRANSFER SCHOLARSHIPS OFFERED TO MEMBERS**

- ❖ More than 600 four-year colleges and universities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Canada and Great Britain, and five institutions with online degree programs offer designated scholarships to Phi Theta Kappa members.
- ❖ Presently, \$36 million in scholarships is offered to Phi Theta Kappa members through this program.
- ❖ Phi Theta Kappa is currently developing a new web-based system to facilitate transfer planning as early the first days of enrollment at the community college.

## **ARE YOU INTERESTED IN SUPPORTING SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRANSFER STUDENTS?**

To obtain giving opportunities at Phi Theta Kappa contact Director of Institutional Advancement Dr. Nancy Rieves at 1.800.946.9995, ext. 3537, or [nancy.rieves@ptk.org](mailto:nancy.rieves@ptk.org).

# Transfer Scholarship Recipient Seeks Career in the Arts



Savannah College of Art and Design is a landmark in the historic town of Savannah, Georgia.

**“Taking a chance at something new has led to paths I never knew existed. When charting a course I felt lost — yet it is in looking back that I now realize the direction was actually very clear.”**

*Keri Szymanski*

Savannah College of Art and Design Transfer Scholarship Recipient





Phi Theta Kappa's 2004-2005 International President Keri Szymanski finds herself playing many roles these days – both literally and figuratively - as a student at Savannah College of Art and Design, which provided her a generous transfer scholarship. She has alternated as an artist, sound designer and actress.

Since enrolling at SCAD in Fall 2005, Szymanski has acted in 11 local films, served as a stand-in for two professional shoots filmed in Savannah, and was the only student hired to work on the 2006 Savannah Film Festival.

"As I am learning more, I am able to bring more to the table when booked on a project" she said. "I am frequently re-writing stories, working on sound and even producing some of the projects."

Last year Szymanski also tried live theatre for the first time, when she landed a lead role in a play performed at the Savannah Actors Theatre.

To quote a reviewer, "Keri Szymanski, as Marie, is the clear focal point of the show, and her energy, humor and physical presence fill the intimate space."

But for Szymanski, a lot of the fun associated with production comes behind the scenes.

She has changed her major to sound design with a film minor. She has worked on "Foley" sound design for a graduate animation project entitled *Cereal Killers*, a 20-minute cartoon.

"'Foley' is the term to describe finding all kinds of strange tools and props with which to create a sound to emulate what's taking place on the screen – for example, walking on corn starch sounds more like walking on snow than the sound of actually recording someone walking on the snow," said Szymanski.

Always fascinated by odd sounds, Szymanski remembers dropping lunch meat on the kitchen floor as a child – just to hear the distinctive noise.

"I have no doubt that Phi Theta Kappa prepared me not only to position myself to be this busy at SCAD but to handle, with a level of excellence and professionalism, every project of which I am a part. From time management to communication skills, to integrity to follow-through, I would not be capable or worthy of this life had it not been for Phi Theta Kappa," Szymanski said.

"The year I served as an International Officer completely changed my life. Successfully completing that year, especially after a bit of a rocky start, I felt more accomplished than I have ever felt."

Her Phi Theta Kappa experiences, as a chapter and regional officer prior to her election as International

President, also gave her confidence in her future after graduation.

"I have no concerns about where I'll end up or what I'll be doing. I can work with a team or on my own. I get scared of new things, but do them anyway – all of this I learned in Phi Theta Kappa," she said.

"Sometimes life moves so fast that one doesn't have the time to look around and assess where they've been or where they currently are. Phi Theta Kappa taught me to assess and live in the process, not just the results."

Szymanski said she chose SCAD partially because of her creative interests and partially because of the generous scholarship opportunities available to Phi Theta Kappa members there.

The college is particularly sensitive to the needs of transfer students, she said. Phi Theta Kappa helped her overcome "transfer trauma" also. "I was scared to death to move out of my comfort zone – being a non-traditional student with no art background, I didn't think I'd be able to survive the art foundation classes."

"But my Phi Theta Kappa training gave me the courage to walk into a new and intimidating situation knowing that I would be able to rise to the occasion, meet the challenge and bring something to the table that would make the experience positive."

At the same time success hasn't always come so easily for Szymanski, who suffers from a learning disability. "Fortunately Tompkins-Cortland Community College (in her home state of New York) was very supportive of my alternative methods of learning – they allowed me to start fresh and then proceeded to show me how to build a solid educational foundation for myself," she said.

"SCAD is also extremely supportive. I have discovered that being learning disabled is pretty common among artists. At SCAD all of the professors are happy to help me get what I need.

"This is a challenge for me every day. I'm taking on new areas of study that are completely foreign to me. The craziest part is that I've never been happier," Szymanski said. "I think I have always wanted excellence in my life. For most of my life, however, I just didn't think I was capable of it. I didn't realize how far I could really go until I was introduced to and then involved with Phi Theta Kappa. New skills came to me one by one, the same way we take classes." Szymanski said. "It is up to me to stay sharp and in shape in order to remain on this path of excellence."



# International President Finds Success at Community College



**“I was lost. Tallahassee Community College grabbed my hand, gave me a flashlight and helped me find success. That led me to Phi Theta Kappa, and now I feel I have a purpose again.”**

*Tycia Foster*

2006-2007 International President

2006-2007 International Officers and Executive Director Rod Risley plant a tree at Phi Theta Kappa's Center For Excellence. From left: Preston Schmidt, Tycia Foster, Erin Wilson, David Kerr, Rod Risley and Carlos Acevedo.

## SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL OFFICER SCHOLARSHIPS

Serving as an International Officer is considered the pinnacle of student leadership in Phi Theta Kappa, and the campaign experience has also been hailed as an opportunity for personal growth. An International President and four International Vice Presidents representing the Society's four geographic divisions are elected each year.

International Officer Scholarships are made possible through the generosity of donors to the Phi Theta Kappa Foundation. What does a donation for International Officer Scholarships support?

- ❖ The five members elected annually each receive scholarships of \$2,000 to continue their education.
- ❖ International Officers receive
  - (1) a laptop computer following successful completion of their summer orientation,
  - (2) complimentary internet service throughout their term in office, and
  - (3) a \$1,000 stipend to assist with expenses incurred during their terms.

For more information on how you can donate to the International Officer Scholarship program, contact Director of Institutional Advancement Dr. Nancy Rieves at 1.800.946.9995, ext. 3537, or [nancy.rieves@ptk.org](mailto:nancy.rieves@ptk.org).

Community college opened new doors to Tycia Foster, including opportunities available through Phi Theta Kappa.





By the time Tycia Foster entered Florida A&M University on an academic scholarship at the age of 17 she understood her role in her family.

"I was the smart academic achiever," said Foster, one of six children. "My downfall was, that was all I knew how to do."

In high school, Foster made top grades without studying. In college, she became overextended and her grades began to slide.

"When I was placed in a university setting with thousands of smart kids who also were extreme socialites and leaders, I began to sink," Foster said. "I attempted to get involved in campus life as a leader, socially, and tried to do some community service. My time management skills were poor, and I ended up failing tremendously."

Foster took a break from college. A job as a teacher's aide showed her she had a passion and a gift for working with young people – and would be an outstanding teacher.

"But all the passion in the world could not allow me to teach without a degree, so I knew I had to tackle this college thing again," Foster said.

So Foster enrolled at Tallahassee Community College, which offered a scholarship to childcare workers wishing to study early childhood education. She saw community college as a quick route back to the university.

"I thought that community college was for people who were not as smart as most, or did not know what they wanted to do with their lives," she said. "I was determined to hurry through and get back to REAL school," she said.

Phi Theta Kappa not only helped change her perception of community college, but also of herself.

"I was invited to become a member of Phi Theta Kappa. I was introduced to the four hallmarks: Scholarship, Leadership, Service, and Fellowship, and that was when I became hooked."

In spite of her initial impressions about community college, Foster now realizes Tallahassee Community College allowed her to reinvent herself. "I have been able to do things that even I did not believe I was capable of," she said. "I gained something I lacked in my first college experience. I was able to engage myself in campus life, and benefit not only academically, but become more conscious of issues that affected students."

Foster became president of her Phi Theta Kappa chapter, and attended her first Convention.

"When I attended my first International Convention in my hometown of Dallas, Texas, I saw 4,000 honor

students coming together to celebrate the hallmarks and their involvement in many different prosperous endeavors."

"I was amazed at what the different chapters were doing to make a difference on their campuses and in the surrounding communities. I was just amazed at the impact that Phi Theta Kappa had internationally as well as locally," she said.

"I decided then that I wanted to help other students who were like me – to make their transition into college easier. The best way was to run for International President." Foster was elected at the 2006 International Convention in Seattle.

"Now I can give students the help I needed when I was at their stage of life. Phi Theta Kappa taught me to enjoy helping others as much as making good grades."

Two African American men have served as National and International Presidents of Phi Theta Kappa, but Foster is the first African American woman to hold the office.

"I feel proud to be the first," she said of her pioneering role. "I think it definitely carries a responsibility to perform to the best of my ability."

Foster said her year as International President has been a whirlwind of excitement and learning experiences.

"I feel that I have gained tremendous amounts of confidence in public speaking and leadership roles. I still believe I have a lot to learn, but my year as International President has helped me try more things and assume roles I usually would shy away from," she said.

"I have grown more aware of current events and how I can impact those around me. Social awareness is much more tangible to me now. Before I felt that I wanted to do something, but did not know what. Now I see the avenues and ways to help others."

Foster said her experiences – dropping out of college, becoming a preschool teacher, and finding success as a college student – helped her see the disconnect and miscommunication that can sometimes happen between administration, teachers, and students.

Becoming involved with student organizations has also encouraged her to motivate other students to become active in campus and civic endeavors. She plans to use her International Officer scholarship to pursue a degree in educational leadership and business, although she is interested in public administration as well.

"The drive and the heart of the members I have met this year have really inspired me. I see how dedicated, innovative, and caring our members are and I feel that there is no limit to what we can do."



# All-USA Winner Dreams of *Ending World Poverty*

It wasn't so very long ago that HongJu "Jason" Lee was sitting in his macroeconomics classroom at Lorain County Community College in Ohio as Professor Alan Atwood discussed the plight of low-income countries and their struggle with poverty and disease.

"After class I started to think about all the times in the past I had wished I had more wealth. I started to feel ashamed," Lee said. "I went to the library to further research world poverty. I couldn't put out of my mind a thought my professor had offered in class. He said, 'According to a news article, we can eliminate world poverty within five years if wealthy countries help low income countries financially.'"

Lee completed his research and forwarded his findings to his professor, who encouraged him to further develop his thoughts on the subject.

And that was the birth of Lee's dream, albeit an ambitious one, to cure the world of poverty. His dream is based on building business, trade and marketing skills and teaching them to those in need. While at the community college Lee obtained first-hand experience of poverty and economic growth possibilities by visiting Vietnam and raising funds for victims of the Asian Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina.

In 2006 Lee was selected as a member of the All-Ohio Academic First Team, a New Century Scholar, and a member of the All-USA Academic First Team. "I felt a strong sense of responsibility after becoming a member of the All-USA First Academic Team," said Lee, who considered it an honor simply to be selected as his college's nominee. "After receiving the awards, amazing events happened."

Lee soon found himself giving a speech in the Ohio State Capitol, giving interviews to the media and even seeing his face on billboards. He gave a graduation speech at Lorain County Community College and also appeared on television. Membership in Phi Theta Kappa, he emphasized, and his experience as an All-USA First Team member, broadened his horizons as a community college student.

"As a member of Phi Theta Kappa, there was so much for me to learn about American culture and college life," said Lee, a native of Korea.

"Participating in Phi Theta Kappa gave me a chance to explore the differences and similarities of other communities, while allowing me to build well-rounded skills. Visiting other college campuses across the state for regional events allowed me to meet other successful

students in different environments. Traveling to the International Convention to meet thousands of my peers from across the world really emphasized that there are so many others different than me, yet still similar enough to meet the same criteria I have, to become inducted into this honor society."

"I can see that I am truly part of a much bigger organization, a much bigger world. From my personal experience these opportunities provided me with inspiration and energy that I would never find in my typical college life."

As for his future beyond eventually earning a baccalaureate degree, he still hasn't forgotten that dream formed back at Lorain County Community College.

"Based on my international background, travel and association with people from different countries, I recognized the need for a global economic organization dedicated to developing third-world countries," Lee said. "I would like to use my knowledge and energy to support those who are less fortunate. This goal provides me with a great sense of purpose and meaning in my life."

Many of these life ambitions became apparent to him after experiences both inside and outside the classroom.

"I have been taught the importance of contributing to the community and this lesson went far beyond traditional learning in the classroom. I found that the more I shared my life and myself, the happier I became," Lee said. "These shared moments have allowed me to become more concerned with human diversity, equal opportunity, and cultural pluralism."

He said the greatest challenge he has faced was leaving his family behind in Korea to attend college in the United States, where he had no friends or relatives, and was hampered by knowing very little English. "But I believed in myself and I believed I could overcome any obstacle that I would find in my path," Lee said. "I saw the obstacles as motivational tools."

His challenges did not end after he became acclimated to a new country. His father died after Lee left Korea. "The regret of my not having seen my father before he passed away increases my determination to complete the American education he worked so hard to make possible," Lee said.

"My journey led to a discovery of new things; discovery of a new culture, discovery of new relationships, but most of all discovery of myself. I started my journey with a particular path in mind; however, my experiences have been greater than I could ever imagine."



Phi Theta Kappa, in partnership with the American Association of Community Colleges and USA TODAY, sponsors the annual All-USA Academic Team competition for community college students. First, Second and Third Teams of 20 students each are selected for scholarships and recognition; nominees in 34 states are also honored through All-State Team programs. The most outstanding nominee in each state is named a New Century Scholar.

**“Although I grew up in a small nation, I have never thought that my dreams should be small. Opportunity is the place where vision and discovery meet. It is the place where action must be taken. Action with courage has led to greater discovery and greater opportunity enhancing my vision and journey.”**

*Jason Lee*

All-USA Academic First Team Member



Jason Lee

*Visionary*

## **ESTABLISH A SCHOLARSHIP TODAY**

Donors may establish a scholarship in their name or in the name of one they wish to honor by providing an annual gift. Phi Theta Kappa recognizes individuals, families, foundations, companies, and organizations providing funds for merit or need-based scholarships to defray costs of pursuing associate, bachelor's, and graduate degree programs at regionally or governmentally accredited institutions. Donors may make an annual gift each year to fund the scholarship or may establish an endowment for funding the scholarship permanently. In the case of an endowment, investment earnings from the donor's gift are used to fund the named scholarship each year; the principal is not spent. Investment earnings should provide funds for a \$1,000 minimum scholarship to be awarded annually.

For more information on how you can establish a scholarship at Phi Theta Kappa, contact Director of Institutional Advancement Dr. Nancy Rieves at 1.800.946.9995, ext. 3537, or [nancy.rieves@ptk.org](mailto:nancy.rieves@ptk.org).



# Leader of Promise

## Learns Leadership Begins at Home



**Solomon Bortey**

2006 Leader of Promise Solomon Bortey was a young teenager when his mother and father left him and his younger brother in the West African nation of Ghana to find work in the United States. Some years later the two boys joined their parents, but found their new life to be very different. Their parents went to work in the afternoon and returned in the morning, and while in Ghana the boys could rely upon their grandmother to help with household duties, they had no such support system in their adopted country.

So Bortey took responsibility for caring for his younger brother Steward, then in the sixth grade, assuming the role of a parent although he was still a teen himself.

"Caring for Steward has taught me that parenting is more than caretaking; it is taking up a responsibility beyond the norm and sight of a bachelor. Steward made me move beyond caring for myself," Bortey said. "My experience with him has been an exercise in self-discipline."

Bortey awakes early each morning, tends to household chores, makes breakfast for Steward and sees him off to school – all before attending classes himself at Rose State Community College in Oklahoma.

"As a semi-parent, I have to make sure Steward has done his homework and understands it, take him to and from school, soccer, basketball, and track practice, all of which I had never included in my definition of parenting," Bortey said. His culture dictates that as the first-born, he has a responsibility to help care for his younger brother, but also must concentrate on his studies and obligations as a student leader.

A former Phi Theta Kappa chapter officer and Western District Vice President of the Oklahoma/Arkansas Region, Bortey was initially unfamiliar with the Society when he received his invitation to membership.

"I got involved in Phi Theta Kappa out of curiosity; I asked a friend who is a member, and she took me to the advisor who gave me more insight about the Society. After our discussion I accepted my invitation and was inducted that semester," Bortey explained.

"Being part of the Society has really helped me personally and socially in that I have gone to places and met leaders from different backgrounds, ideologies, and schools. I do not know what I would do without Phi Theta Kappa."

Phi Theta Kappa membership and the Society's recognition opportunities helped Bortey overcome the challenges of cultural change and the transition from British to American English, he said, and becoming a Leader of Promise boosted his self-confidence even more.

"Being named a Leader of Promise made me realize that I have a great potential inside me and that whatever I plan to do, with perseverance, I can accomplish even more," Bortey said. "The scholarship came at the right time – it helped with tuition and enabled me to buy my textbooks for the semester."

Bortey is studying pre-med and computer engineering at Rose State, with plans to become a physician and work with the changing computer technologies. He hopes someday to return to his native Ghana to help educate youth.

Bortey dreams of attending Boston College, Harvard or Stanford – and while family obligations and finances will be a consideration, the one thing he has learned since coming to the United States is that with hard work, achieving big dreams is possible.

"There is a saying derived from Deuteronomy 30:19, 'You are the result of the choices you made yesterday,'" Bortey said. "Today I do not regret my decisions on education, and above all the decision to accept membership in Phi Theta Kappa. Electing to become a Phi Theta Kappa member has been the greatest and the best choice in my life."

**ARE YOU INTERESTED  
IN SUPPORTING STUDENTS  
LIKE SOLOMON?**

You can make a difference in the lives of members like Solomon Bortey by supporting the Leaders of Promise Scholarship Program. Phi Theta Kappa is committed to the development of leadership and service through scholarship opportunities – the Leaders of Promise Scholarship Program is one way to provide students the ability to complete their degrees.

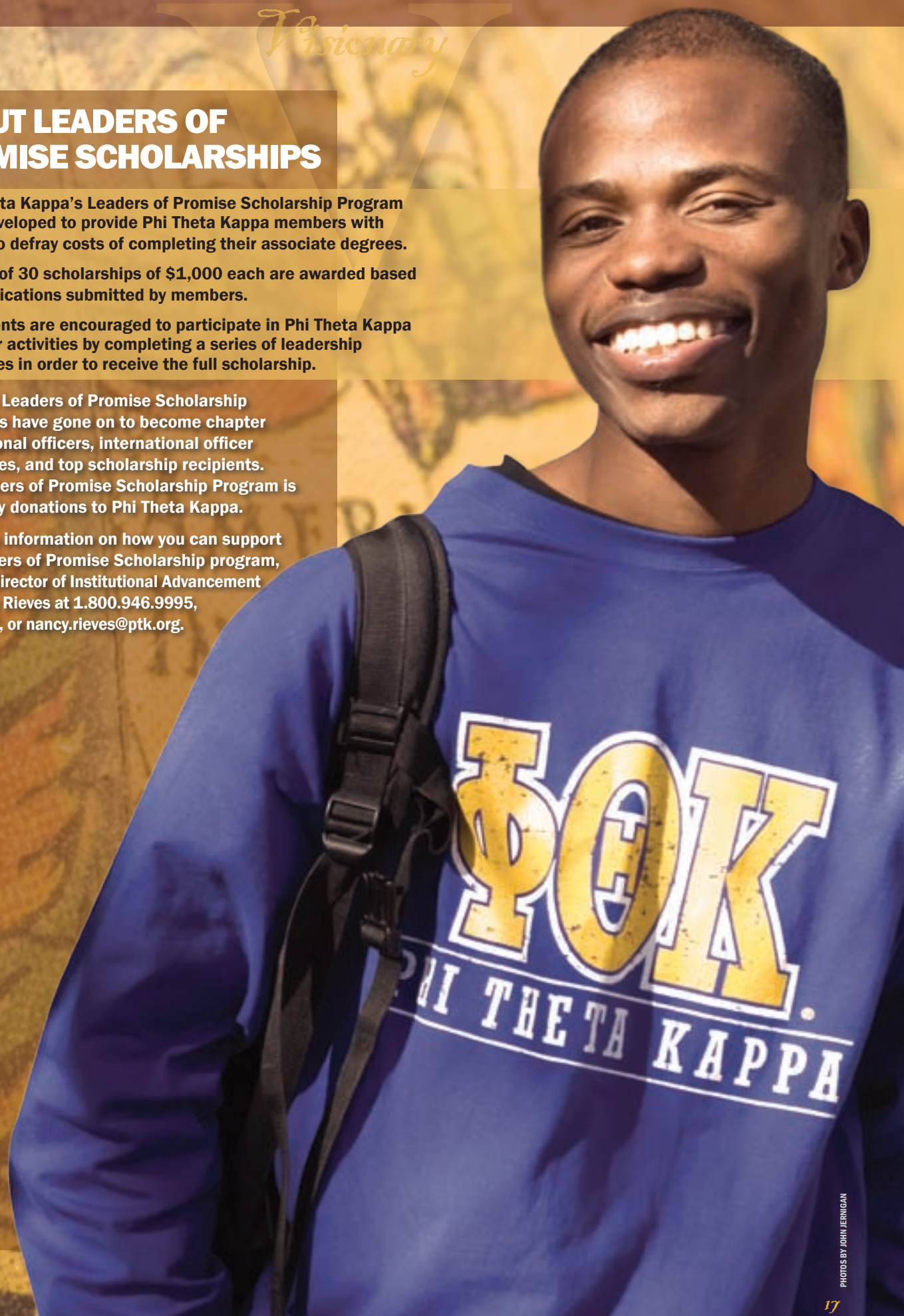


## ABOUT LEADERS OF PROMISE SCHOLARSHIPS


- ❖ Phi Theta Kappa's Leaders of Promise Scholarship Program was developed to provide Phi Theta Kappa members with funds to defray costs of completing their associate degrees.
- ❖ A total of 30 scholarships of \$1,000 each are awarded based on applications submitted by members.
- ❖ Recipients are encouraged to participate in Phi Theta Kappa chapter activities by completing a series of leadership activities in order to receive the full scholarship.

Many Leaders of Promise Scholarship recipients have gone on to become chapter and regional officers, international officer candidates, and top scholarship recipients. The Leaders of Promise Scholarship Program is funded by donations to Phi Theta Kappa.

For more information on how you can support the Leaders of Promise Scholarship program, contact Director of Institutional Advancement Dr. Nancy Rieves at 1.800.946.9995, ext. 3537, or [nancy.rieves@ptk.org](mailto:nancy.rieves@ptk.org).







# Coca-Cola Scholar Juggles Education, Work and Volunteerism

Coca-Cola Scholarship winner Aja Patterson volunteers regularly at three social service agencies, works full time and carries a full class load at Harold Washington College in Chicago.

## **COCA-COLA SCHOLARSHIPS RECOGNIZE 187 PHI THETA KAPPA MEMBERS IN 2006**

- ❖ The Coca-Cola Two-Year Colleges Scholarship Program is made possible with funding from the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation. The Whitehead Foundation provides grants in support of human services initiatives.
- ❖ Each year, every two-year institution is invited to nominate one student for the Coca-Cola Scholars Foundation award. Selection is based on academic excellence and community service. Visit <https://www.coca-colascholars.org/cokeWeb/jsp/scholars/Index.jsp> for information.
- ❖ 187 Phi Theta Kappa members were selected to receive Coca-Cola Two-Year College Scholarships of \$1,000 each in 2006. As many as 350 scholarships may be awarded.

Aja Patterson often closes her eyes and tries to put herself in the shoes of a teenage runaway, although she is in fact a successful first-generation community college student who manages two jobs and three volunteer responsibilities in addition to her 18-hour course load.

Patterson said she mastered the technique when she began to volunteer for the National Runaway Switchboard. Yet, life wasn't always easy for her either – she didn't always view herself as the scholar she is today, and sometimes she can't help seeing a little of herself in the teens she counsels.



**“Volunteering exposes me to groups and issues that I otherwise wouldn’t encounter on a daily basis. It’s a great way to keep things in perspective and know that the world is still out there and it doesn’t revolve around you.”**

*Aja Patterson*

Coca-Cola Scholarship Recipient

“I used to wonder how I would know how to become successful in life because I didn’t grow up around success. I first started college as a full-time student during August of 2005. I was afraid I would not be able to perform well in college due to the many barriers I had to overcome such as having a full-time job, being a first-generation student, and facing multiple financial hardships,” Patterson said.

But in 2006, 187 Phi Theta Kappa members were selected to receive Coca-Cola Two-Year College Scholarships of \$1,000 each in recognition of their academic excellence and volunteer contributions, and Patterson, a computer science major at Harold Washington College in Chicago, Illinois, was among them.

She volunteers at a local charity, Deborah’s Place, at the National Food Depository, and for the National Runaway Switchboard as a Liner. “Liners” assist callers with identified needs such as filing abuse reports, finding shelter or making arrangements to return home.

“I found myself with some extra time and decided to fill it with something positive. I started looking through various programs to see what type of volunteer work I could get involved in,” Patterson said of her volunteer activities. “When I discovered the statistics on runaway youths I just felt that this is where I could help – as a crisis liner.”

She learned that every day between 1.3 and 2.8 million runaway and homeless youth live on the streets of America. One out of every seven children will run away from home before the age of 18. The mission at the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) is to help keep America’s runaway and at-risk youth safe and off the streets.

“The most fulfilling part of working at NRS is leaving with that incredible feeling that, in some small way, maybe I was able to help someone in a time of crisis,” Patterson said. “My passion for this cause is strengthened when I close my eyes and think about a time in my life

when I was scared, lonely and frightened. If I go back into those feelings and thoughts and really relive how they made me feel, I realize that this is exactly where every child who runs away is right before he or she leaves home. And I know that NRS is there to listen and help those kids every day of the year.”

Patterson said as a teen she was an average student in high school with questionable future plans. “I was more focused on what was popular rather than beneficial. There were so many things to get involved with and I didn’t get involved with really anything. When I decided to go back

to college I told myself that I would no longer be passive, but take an active interest in everything I possibly could. I wanted more out of my college experience than just attending classes like most traditional-aged students,” she said. “That was one of the reasons I got involved with Phi Theta Kappa. Becoming involved with Phi Theta Kappa gave me the chance to experience different things and participate in leadership roles.”

Patterson was delighted to have that chance after originally being afraid she would not perform well in college due to the many barriers she had to overcome. “I currently work two jobs to support myself while attending school full time. So, my life involves juggling tasks and staying afloat,” she said. “At first glance people ask me how I manage. I have discovered that the more time I spend doing things the better I feel about myself. In the past I have had many idle times to enjoy. I would prefer not to work so much, but in the end I can see the career I’ve been reaching so hard for and I will continue to push toward that goal.”

“I know it sounds cliché but volunteering makes you feel like you’re giving something back. It is really easy to get so consumed by the details of your own personal daily life – especially in college – and then only experience the people and places within your college or work atmosphere,” Patterson said. “Through volunteer work, I have truly become a better person and plan to continue my commitment to public service for the rest of my life.”

“Not only did this scholarship alleviate some of my financial worries, but it also gave me a confidence boost. During the times I question my capability of finishing my degree I can now look back at this show of support and know that I can achieve anything.”

Patterson is well on her way. She has received a scholarship to Yale University, and will transfer there in the fall.



# Crossing Borders:

## Jack Kent Cooke Scholar Discovers Life through Literature and Travel


### **JACK KENT COOKE FOUNDATION PROVIDES GENEROUS SCHOLARSHIPS TO COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS**

- ❖ The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Scholarship Program is the largest private scholarship initiative in the United States.
- ❖ A total of 158 undergraduate scholarships have been awarded since the program's inception in 2002 – 100 to Phi Theta Kappa members.
- ❖ Phi Theta Kappa works in partnership with the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation to promote the scholarships awarded for the completion of baccalaureate studies, which are valued at up to \$30,000 each.
- ❖ Thirty-two members of Phi Theta Kappa were among the 38 community college students chosen to receive the 2006 Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Scholarships.
- ❖ Learn more at [www.jackkentcookefoundation.org](http://www.jackkentcookefoundation.org).
- ❖ Phi Theta Kappa Executive Director Rod A. Risley was appointed to the Community College Transfer Initiative Advisory Board in 2005. The eight-member board works with the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation to address the institutional challenges that well-qualified students from low-income backgrounds face as they pursue their dreams of higher education.

Viviana Alcazar is a recipient of a Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship that is helping her become the first generation college graduate in her family.







*"I believe that in a world that seems increasingly more fractious and in which cultural differences are stressed so much, the opportunity to travel and to cross national and cultural borders through the study of languages and literatures has helped me to discover our profoundly human connections."*

*Viviana Alcazar*

Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship Recipient

Jack Kent Cooke Scholar and Phi Theta Kappa member Viviana Alcazar could be called a citizen of the world.

She is a traveler in a very real sense – a native of Mexico, Alcazar is currently studying in the United States. She spent one summer in Perugia, Italy, studying Italian, and was enrolled for two quarters at Oxford University in England.

Her educational journeys have led her to discover literature, which she describes as her passion as well as her eventual vocation.

"I see my experiences abroad as interconnected to my passion for literature. I think this is the way these experiences have shaped my life," Alcazar said.

Alcazar vividly recalls the time she read first the works of Irish poet and Nobel Prize-winner Seamus Heaney. She was a 20-year-old Mexican immigrant embarking on a study of English, new to the experience of literature and the pursuit of a higher education, enrolled in Cañada College in California.

Heaney's poem *Digging*, a comparison of the ways his father's work with the soil and his own poetry both evoke the past, especially spoke to Alcazar.

"The three closing lines 'Between my finger and my thumb/ The squat pen rests./ I'll dig with it' created such a big impression on me," she recalled.

"These three lines created an image that intimately and powerfully captured my experience and created a bridge between the poet's experiences and my own.

"I, just like Heaney, represent the last generation, the closing link in a chain of ancestors dedicated to the work in the fields and the first link in a chain of people who will enjoy the privilege of pursuing an education," said Alcazar, the first in her family to complete elementary school.

"I realized that regardless of time, place, gender, ethnic and cultural differences, I shared a common experience with Heaney. With these three lines, I started to discover the pleasure of studying literature in order to find the links that cross borders between, and illustrate the communality, of human experience," she said.

"At that point, I had crossed a physical border

between Mexico and the United States. Now, by learning English and studying its literature, I was also crossing an intellectual border."

"When I started at Cañada College, I was trying to become the first generation in my family to get an education," Alcazar said. She knew that to succeed in college she would need to find mentors and role models.

"The professors at my community college created a very nurturing and encouraging academic environment for me that would help me to succeed, but also kept me motivated to continue with my dream of pursuing an education."

Alcazar also found her involvement with Phi Theta Kappa to be a unique and rewarding experience.

"First, I found an organization that recognized, encouraged and celebrated my search for academic excellence. Phi Theta Kappa offered me the opportunity to be in an environment where scholarship was essential ... an environment that embraced the exchange of ideas, and at the same time created a sense of fellowship among its members and also among other chapters around the area and around the country."

When it came time to leave the shelter of the community college, Alcazar felt that her only options would be large public universities. She thought she lacked both the financial and academic resources to apply to the small liberal-arts colleges she would prefer.

Then her selection as a 2004 Jack Kent Cooke Scholar gave her new opportunities to continue her educational journey.

"The Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship became a turning point in my life and my experience in the United States," Alcazar said.

Alcazar is now a senior at Stanford University in California, seeking a double major in English and Spanish literature. She is applying to Ph.D. programs in comparative literature. In the future she hopes to teach literature at a community college or a small liberal arts college.

"This is what these opportunities have given me and what I as a teacher hope to pass on to others."



# Nota Bene Scholarship Winner Enjoys a Second Chance at Academic Success

Phi Theta Kappa annually publishes a literary anthology, *Nota Bene* (Latin for “note well”), showcasing the writing of community college students. A \$1,000 Citation Scholarship is presented to the best overall entry; other scholarships are also available.

“The *Nota Bene* Citation Scholarship was a heartfelt encouragement to ‘keep on keeping on,’ with education, with writing, and with other things which can bring value to others and myself.”

So says Dean Stewart, a member of Phi Theta Kappa at Santa Monica College in California and winner of the 2006 Citation Scholarship for his short story, “Pain,” published in Phi Theta Kappa’s literary anthology, *Nota Bene*. Stewart donated his \$1,000 scholarship to the Santa Monica College Foundation to be used in their new theatre complex.

A returning adult student, Dean found academic success the second time around after a lackluster academic career in high school and later employment as an actor and an accountant. “My primary purpose for returning to school in my later years was to enhance my writing and life through a broader view of the world,” he said.

“When I first read the brochure on Phi Theta Kappa in the Santa Monica College Library three years ago, I wondered if I could qualify. It had never occurred to me that I might be an honor student until I checked my transcripts.” When the invitation came, Dean accepted.

“Phi Theta Kappa gave me more than I can ever give back. It was a wonderful accomplishment for me, especially because I was such a dud — just short of a juvenile delinquent — in high school. It was also nice to be involved with others who were serious about giving their best to their individual growth, and with terrific professors who served as advisors,” said Dean, also a member of other honor societies.

“When some of us are young high school graduates starting in college, we find that college is really hard — so we quit. We give up and search for an easier, softer way. It takes some of us longer than others to figure



Dean Stewart

out the old axiom that you only get out what you put in,” Dean explained.

Dean’s early career plans focuses on acting. “At Pasadena High School I had the leads in the class plays in both my junior and senior years and definitely had my sights set on being an actor. I attended Pasadena City College for two semesters, did some more plays and thought I was ready. I worked professionally in several TV shows and one film and was admitted into Actors Studio by Lee Strasberg. But I wasn’t passionate enough and that career slipped away,” he said.

“After taking several accounting courses and business courses at UCLA Extension, I worked in the entertainment industry as an accountant, mostly processing residuals for actors, writers and directors. Although I am semi-retired, I still work for two different companies as a residuals accountant. I still enjoy acting from time to time and was in two plays while at Santa Monica College. It is great fun and hard work. I also love tennis. I am having the time of my life.”

Dean majored in Theatre Arts at Santa Monica College, where he received an associate of arts degree in 2006. He has since transferred to College of the Canyons in Redwood, California, and eventually hopes to earn a bachelor’s degree in English with an emphasis in creative writing.

“I would like very much to be a writer. I went through the Writing for Film and Television certificate program at UCLA Extension and have won some significant awards for my screenplays although none of them have been produced,” Dean said. “I am working on the twelfth draft of my first novel and have published two short stories and one poem. I have submitted my winning entry in the *Nota Bene* competition, ‘Pain,’ for other publications.”

Dean cites his decisions to return to school and accept membership Phi Theta Kappa and other honors organizations as turning points that led him to success. He says he has also learned, “to do whatever I do with as much heart and dedication as I can muster. Too often in my younger days, I did things halfheartedly.”





NOTA BENE  
2006

“Phi Theta Kappa gave me more than I could ever give back. ... It was also nice to be involved with others who were serious about giving their best to their individual growth, and with terrific professors who served as advisors.”

*Dean Stewart*

2006 Citation Scholarship Winner

## **SUPPORT PHI THETA KAPPA LITERARY SCHOLARSHIPS**

*Nota Bene*, Phi Theta Kappa's honors anthology, was first published in 1994. The literary collection is published annually and circulated to more than 1,200 two-year college libraries around the world. This anthology is comprised of outstanding prose, poetry, and short story entries submitted by Phi Theta Kappa students and juried by a distinguished panel.

Approximately 30 entries are included in the anthology each year. The author of the most outstanding submission is presented with the Citation Scholarship, an award of \$1,000. Four manuscripts are chosen to receive Reynolds Scholarships, awards of \$500 each.

For more information on how you can support this program, contact Director of Institutional Advancement Dr. Nancy Rieves at 1.800.946.9995, ext. 3537, or [nancy.rieves@ptk.org](mailto:nancy.rieves@ptk.org).

*Visionary*



## ALUMNI INVITED TO CONTINUE PARTICIPATION IN PHI THETA KAPPA

Alumni are offered numerous opportunities to connect and give back to Phi Theta Kappa.

### CONNECT

- ❖ Attend an International Convention and relive the excitement and experience of Phi Theta Kappa programs. Come back to serve as a forum presenter or connect with other alumni at the foundation booth and alumni banquet.
- ❖ Visit the online directory ([http://www.ptk.org/alumni/al\\_dir.htm](http://www.ptk.org/alumni/al_dir.htm)) to reconnect with past friends and meet new ones who share common interests.
- ❖ Join the International Alumni Association. Membership in the International Alumni Association of Phi Theta Kappa is awarded those alumni who provide financial support to the Phi Theta Kappa Foundation.

### GIVE

- ❖ Serve alongside other alumni at a local or regional alumni association ([http://www.ptk.org/alumni/al\\_intro.htm](http://www.ptk.org/alumni/al_intro.htm)).
- ❖ Provide financial support to Phi Theta Kappa's many scholarship programs or leave a legacy through an Alpha Courtyard brick donation.

For more information, contact the Alumni Office at 601.984.3577.

Phi Theta Kappa gave Mirta Ojito the confidence she needed to pursue a career as a journalist.

## 2006 Distinguished Alumna Navigates Course from Refugee to Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist



PHOTO BY CLAIRE HOLT



Phi Theta Kappa's 2006 Distinguished Alumna Mirta Ojito vividly recalls the day in 1980 when she entered a makeshift immigration office to register her presence in the United States. As she describes in her book, *Finding Mañana: A Memoir of a Cuban Exodus*:

*... A bald man with a military bearing but dressed as a civilian was in charge of my file. In flawless Spanish he asked my name. Before I could tell him, though, he said I could choose any name I wanted. It didn't have to be my real name.*

*You are in America now, he said. You can forget the past and begin anew. I thought the man was joking, but his face remained serious, waiting for my response.*

*Thank you, I said, but I'll keep my name.*

*I didn't tell him that my name was all I had. My name and my memories.*

Ojito, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author, accepted Phi Theta Kappa's 2006 Distinguished Alumna Award during the Society's International Convention in Seattle. The former *New York Times* reporter was nominated by her Phi Theta Kappa chapter at Miami-Dade College in Florida.



She spoke of her exodus to the United States from Cuba at the age of 16 as part of the Mariel boatlift, and the integral role that her own membership in Phi Theta Kappa played in the academic and personal successes that she experienced.

"This is such an honor, and reminds me how important Phi Theta Kappa and community colleges have been in my life," Ojito said. "When I became a member of Phi Theta Kappa, you can't imagine what it meant to me," she said, recalling her challenges when she first came to the United States. "Twenty-six years ago I came to this country with nothing but hope," she said. "Phi Theta Kappa and Miami-Dade College changed the life of this emigrant."

Ojito said the recognition Phi Theta Kappa brought came at a time in her life when she needed it most. Language had been one of many barriers to her when she arrived in the United States and she tried to cope by reading.

"I read a lot – all the time, often with the help of a dictionary. That was an important goal – the only one I had when I came to the United States – to learn English as fast I could," she said of her experience.

"The people who selected me to be in Phi Theta Kappa at Miami-Dade were the first people who realized I existed since I came from Cuba. I had a bad high school experience," Ojito said. "Being invited to membership in Phi Theta Kappa was important to me on two levels – the

recognition – that someone notices you, and the full scholarship made my education possible. It is incredibly important to be remembered by Phi Theta Kappa after so many years. It is thrilling and an honor."

Ojito returned to Phi Theta Kappa's 2007 International Convention, and served on the alumni panel that posed questions to keynote speaker Al Gore.

After Miami-Dade College she used her Phi Theta Kappa transfer scholarship to earn a baccalaureate degree from Florida Atlantic University and went on to receive a mid-career master's degree from Columbia University.

In addition to winning a shared Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting in 2001 for a *New York Times* series of articles about race in America, Ojito also earned the American Society of Newspaper Editors' Award for Best Foreign Reporting in 1999. *Newsday* selected *Finding Mañana* as one of its favorite books of 2005.

Her work has been included in several anthologies including *To Mend the World: Women Reflect on 9/11* (White Pine Press, 2002), *Written into History: Pulitzer Prize Reporting of the Twentieth Century from The New York Times* (Henry Holt and Co., 2001), *By Heart/De Memoria* (Temple University Press, 2003), and *How Race is Lived in America* (Times Books/Henry Holt and Co., 2001).

Ojito has taught journalism at New York University, Columbia University and the University of Miami. In January of 2006, she joined the full time faculty of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University as a visiting professor. She continues to write for *The New York Times* from New York, where she lives with her husband, Arturo Villar, and their three boys.

"I have learned in my life first of all to follow my heart in terms of career, trust my instincts, and work very, very hard," Ojito said. "Honestly, without really plotting a future, I said I am going to do the best possible job with what I have here, and that has propelled me forward."



# Phi Theta Kappa *Navigating Toward Excellence*

## *Athena Society*

### **Planned Gifts:**

*The Athena Society consists of individuals who have made a planned gift to Phi Theta Kappa. Planned gifts include bequests, trusts, life insurance and other deferred giving options that allow individuals to contribute to Phi Theta Kappa while making plans beneficial to their individual financial circumstances. The individuals listed here represent many, but not all of those who have chosen to contribute to the future of Phi Theta Kappa in this manner.*

June Cordier  
Laura Dupree  
Shirley B. Gordon  
Margaret and Jack Guistwhite  
Kathy Hayes  
Nancy Rieves  
Rod Risley  
Billy Wilson

## *Oak Leaf Society*

### **Endowments:**

*The Oak Leaf Society consists of donors who have chosen to endow Honors Institute and Faculty Scholar Conference Lectures, scholarships for members and advisors, and an endowment for Phi Theta Kappa operations - The Endowment for Excellence.*

Robert C. Blank  
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## *Jefferson Society* \$25,000 and above

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## *Mosel Society* \$5,000-\$9,999

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Phi Theta Kappa expresses gratitude for these gifts received in 2006 from our valued supporters. These donors have made an investment in the future of the Society, its programs and the members and advisors. We graciously thank them for their continued support by investing in Phi Theta Kappa.

### *Scholars Society* \$500-\$999

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# Giving Opportunities

The stories in this issue illustrate that Phi Theta Kappa plays a vital role in the lives of extraordinary students. The generosity of philanthropic partners, who support the Society's mission through outright gifts, sponsorships and in-kind donations, help make this possible. Your investment enables Phi Theta Kappa to expand programs and offer more scholarships, attract talented speakers and enhance leadership opportunities. Your gift, whether unrestricted or specifically designated to an area you desire to support, can make a positive impact on programs and students. Gifts may be given annually and/or by establishing an endowment. Endowments provide permanent funding in which the gift is invested and only the earnings support the scholarship or award specified. You can actively participate in creating a better future for deserving Phi Theta Kappa students in a number of ways:

## SCHOLARSHIPS

### Named Scholarships

Donors may establish a scholarship in their names or in the name of one they wish to honor. Phi Theta Kappa recognizes individuals, families, foundations, companies, and organizations providing funds for merit or need-based scholarships to defray costs of pursuing associate, bachelor's, and graduate degree programs at regionally or governmentally accredited institutions. Donors may make an annual gift each year to fund the scholarship or may establish an endowment for funding the scholarship permanently.

**Minimum amount required:** \$25,000 to establish named scholarship endowment (may be paid over time) OR  
\$1,000 given each year to award a scholarship

**Need:** Unlimited

### Guistwhite Scholarships

This merit-based program provides outstanding Phi Theta Kappa members funding for completing baccalaureate degree programs. Guistwhite Scholars receive \$5,000 each, (\$1,250 per term) to defray costs of completing a baccalaureate degree.

**Minimum amount required:** \$100,000 endowment (may be paid over time) OR  
\$5,000 given each year to award a scholarship

**Need:** Unlimited

### Leaders of Promise Scholarships

The Leaders of Promise Scholarship Program encourages new member participation in Society programs by defraying costs of completing an associate degree program. Scholarships of \$1,000 each are awarded based on applications. Recipients receive an initial \$500 disbursement and must complete a series of leadership activities in order to receive the second disbursement.

**Minimum amount required:** \$25,000 endowment (may be paid over time) OR  
\$1,000 given each year to award a scholarship  
**Need:** Unlimited

## Mosal Awards

Chapter advisors with at least three years of service are invited to apply for Mosal Awards, named for the Society's longtime Executive Director, the late Dr. Margaret Mosal. Recipients are selected on the basis of their past professional accomplishments unrelated to Phi Theta Kappa duties, and their proposed projects for continuing professional development. Mosal Awards carry stipends of \$5,000 each. Contributions made to Mosal Awards assist Phi Theta Kappa and two-year colleges in retaining outstanding two-year college faculty and administrators serving as chapter advisors.

**Minimum amount required:** \$100,000 endowment (may be paid over time) OR

\$5,000 given each year to offer an award

**Need:** Unlimited

## Nota Bene

*Nota Bene*, first published in 1994, is Phi Theta Kappa's literary honors anthology, circulated annually to more than 1,200 two-year college libraries around the world. *Nota Bene* includes outstanding prose, poetry, and short story entries submitted by Phi Theta Kappa members and juried by a distinguished panel. Approximately 30 entries are included in each anthology.

**Minimum amount required:** \$25,000 endowment (may be paid over time) OR

\$1,000 given each year to present an author award.

## International Officers

Five students are elected each year to serve as the Society's International Officers. These students participate in a rigorous development program, preparing speeches, completing tests, and developing presentations on Society programs. They travel extensively, representing the organization at various Society programs and educational conferences. The officers each receive scholarships of \$2,000 for continued education, after the successful completion of their terms in office.

**Minimum amount required:** \$100,000 endowment (may be paid over time) OR  
\$5,000 given each year for five \$1,000 supplements



## PROGRAMS

### Faculty Scholars

Each year, 25 Phi Theta Kappa advisors are chosen by application to be Faculty Scholars. They participate in an academic conference held at the Center for Excellence and led by internationally recognized scholars who address Phi Theta Kappa's Honors Study Topic. Following advanced readings, Faculty Scholars discuss and debate the many issues related to the topic as they prepare for their role as seminar leaders at the summer Honors Institute. All Faculty Scholars' travel and tuition expenses to the Conference and Honors Institute are paid by Phi Theta Kappa.

**Minimum amount required:** \$50,000 endowment per Faculty Scholar Position (may be paid over time) OR \$2,500 given each year to fund a Faculty Scholar position

### Honors Institute Scholarships

Phi Theta Kappa's Honors Institute is often cited as the Society's crown jewel in terms of honors programming. Since 1968, the Honors Institute has provided approximately 375 students an intensive exploration of the Phi Theta Kappa Honors Study Topic. The weeklong program, held on the campus of a four-year college, introduces student members and advisors to the multidisciplinary examination of timely topics outside their current fields of study. Participants hear and react to presentations by acclaimed experts on various aspects of the Honors Study Topic. Tuition is charged for room, board, and program costs.

**Minimum amount required:** \$25,000 endowment for an Institute Scholarship (may be paid over time) OR \$1,000 given each year to fund an Institute scholarship

### International Convention

Each year, Phi Theta Kappa's International Convention attracts nearly 4,000 members, alumni, chapter advisors and college presidents. The Convention program includes such internationally known speakers as former Vice President Al Gore, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, news pundit Cokie Roberts and entertainer Trisha Yearwood. Educational forums, college and career fairs, and candidate campaigns provide attendees an instructive and inspiring experience. Preceding the Convention are chapter and regional officer academies and chapter advisor pre-conferences. Attendees pay registration fees to participate in the academies and general Convention activities. Attending the Convention helps attendees grasp an understanding of Phi Theta Kappa programs and serves as a springboard for engaging in programs the next year.

**Minimum amount required:** \$5,000 to endow a Convention registration (may be paid over time) OR \$250 given each year to fund a Convention Registration

## OTHER

### Greatest Need

Numerous aspects contribute to creating the Phi Theta Kappa of today. Your donation to help meet other needs tremendously assists Phi Theta Kappa in supporting the Society goals.

**Minimum amount required:** No minimum required

### Local Chapters and Regions

All Phi Theta Kappa chapters have projects that require funds. If your interests lie in providing financial assistance to a chapter or region, Phi Theta Kappa will manage the funds and distribute as directed by donor.

**Minimum amount required:** No minimum required

### Giving with IRA Distributions

According to a new law, individuals age 70½ or older are allowed to make tax-free distributions of up to \$100,000 in 2007 from their Individual Retirement Accounts to tax-exempt charity.

**How does this work?** When an individual reaches age 70½, he or she is generally required to receive distributions from his or her IRA. Typically the distribution is taxed as income when money is withdrawn from an IRA. If IRA distributions are made to a charity, the distributions will receive the same treatment as distributions to the taxpayer, but instead, no taxes are incurred.

**How do I make an IRA gift?** IRAs are usually held by a financial institution or trust company. A form is typically provided by these institutions that could be used to transfer the IRA funds directly to charity, with no tax incurred.

**Why should I consider this?** These contributions allow individuals to make gifts tax-free in support of Phi Theta Kappa. See this page and the preceding pages for more information on giving to specific areas of Phi Theta Kappa.

**Why now?** The provision expires December 31, 2007.

**Is there any chance the law will change?** As of this writing, a bill is being introduced into Congress, The Public Good IRA Rollover Act of 2007, which would be permanent, would remove the \$100,000 annual limit on donations, and would provide IRA owners with a planned giving option starting at age 59½.

Consider taking advantage of this offering and consider Phi Theta Kappa as your charity.

Phi Theta Kappa does not provide tax advice. Since some IRA transfers do not count as qualified distributions, please consult a tax professional in regard to your specific circumstances.

### Bequests and Deferred Gifts

Phi Theta Kappa welcomes bequests and other deferred gifts, which are meaningful ways to create a legacy for future generations. A bequest or deferred gift may be made through a provision in an estate plan naming Phi Theta Kappa as beneficiary. For further information please contact Director of Institutional Advancement Dr. Nancy Rieves at 1.800.945.9996, ext. 3537, or nancy.rieves@ptk.org.



# Visionary



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through the pursuit  
of truths, the quest  
for excellence is a  
pursuit that knows  
no final destination.  
Value is found in  
the journey itself.

*Red A. Risley*

Executive Director  
Phi Theta Kappa

