

Masked Honoree Acceptance Speech

March 7, 2014

Approximately 5 minutes when spoken

(To announcer.) Thank you.

Michael Lomax, Mayor Nutter – colleagues and other attendees – and everyone who had a hand in putting this event together:

Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here with you. To be recognized by one of the finest education organizations in the country is truly an honor. And I'm grateful. Not just for this award, but for the meaning of this evening. We gather tonight for one of the most important causes of our time: educating the next generation of leaders. To pay it forward. And I know that by the end of the night, the money raised will make a difference in the lives of *thousands* of young people.

Many of you may not know, but I grew up in Birmingham, AL—a child of the 50s. I went to undergrad in L.A. and eventually came to the northeast for grad school, and to start my career. And when I first came to Philly, there was one thing that really stood out about the city. If any of you in here are not from here, you may know what I mean: Philadelphia is a tough town to take on. It's hard to crack.

But there were three people who helped me tremendously. A frat brother, Bruce Crawley and Sharmain Matlock, when I first got here; and Mr. Bob Vogel, when I was appointed CEO of The AmeriHealth Caritas Family of Companies. Their advice and support helped me get on my feet. It paved the way for me demonstrate my talents and

Speech written by Cheril N. Clarke

make a name for myself in the business that I have loved since I was ten years old. The help of these three people helped me become the leader that I am today. And it has been worth millions of dollars. Billions, really, for my company.

That's why it's so energizing to be here tonight. Because I know that I'm in a room full of people who share the same passion and dedication to helping others. Who understand how higher education and mentorship can change the trajectory of a person's life.

When I was growing up in Birmingham, I would go out with my father on Sundays when he made his rounds as a public health worker. Door to door. Family by family. There were lots of coal mines, which meant lots of lung illnesses in the community. My father would go out and try to get people to have their chest x-rayed, because that's how it was detected back then. Watching him take pride in helping others left an indelible impression on me. I knew then that my life's work would be along the same path. I wanted to help people get care, stay well and build healthy communities.

My two decades at AmeriHealth Caritas has been devoted to doing just that.

AmeriHealth enables nearly five million people to have access to quality health care.

From the urban edges of Philadelphia to rural fields of Nebraska. From the bayous in

Louisiana to quadrants in our nation's capital. We're a leading provider of Medicaid

services and we make *sure* our members get the help they need.

Through *internal* initiatives like our Executive Leadership Link program, which provides up-and-coming associates with leadership training; and our Diamonds in the Rough program, which was rolled out as a part of the Pennsylvania Welfare to Work initiative, we continue to be more than just a health care company but a community builder. And though my leadership at AmeriHealth Caritas is coming to a close, I'm confident that care will remain at the heart of the company's work.

As a parent, and as business leader, I believe I have the obligation to the next generation: to pass on to them all of the wisdom that was given to me, and all that I gained on my own. To help those who may need it, financially, through great organizations like the UNCF. To let them know that they have every right to all of the good things in life as anyone else. And to encourage them to chase their dreams.

Since 1944, the UNCF has played a pivotal role in providing nearly a half-a-million students financial assistance. Tonight you'll meet one those students. He was born and raised in Philly, and has triumphed in the face of adversity. His childhood years were weighted down by hardship and loss, but Sam J. Laurencin chose not to be a victim of circumstance. He completed his undergrad and graduate studies at Drexel University. And thanks to a partnership between the UNCF and pharmaceutical giant, Merck, he is on his way to earning his PhD in medicine and chemical engineering. That is the power of this organization and why we must continue supporting it.

So while we have a great time tonight with our masks, let our pledges be the fuel for the next generation of leaders to become unmasked. To become visible and unleash their power. Let us take every opportunity to remind them that while they may not be able to control their beginning, they can certainly shape their journey. That they can go as far as they want, not as far as someone else will let them; and that education is the key. It's more than a piece of paper. It's freedom. And independence. It's power. – And it's why we're here tonight.

I want to thank you so much for this award and thank you so much for coming out to support this great organization. Thank you.