On behalf of Georgia Tech, I would like to welcome everyone to this gala dinner celebrating the first 50 years of women at Georgia Tech. This is a very exciting landmark in the life of Georgia Tech, and we are thrilled that you have joined us this evening.

Of course, Georgia Tech’s Evening School of Commerce, which eventually became Georgia State University, began enrolling female students in 1917, and the Technical Institute, which later was spun off as Southern Tech, was co-ed right from the day it opened its doors in 1948. But the first female students to enroll on the North Avenue campus arrived in the fall of 1952 after the Board of Regents reluctantly voted 7-5 to allow women to enroll for degrees that were not offered at any other public institution in the State of Georgia.

In celebration of that decision, Marilyn Monroe appeared on the cover of *Look* magazine wearing a Georgia Tech sweater. But if you ask Shirley Mewborn, whom we honor tonight as one of the first two women to graduate, I don’t think she would describe those early years as glamorous. She had to take welding for reasons that are still not clear today, and when one professor refused to allow female students in his drawing lab, she had to find another drawing class.

But Shirley hadn’t come looking for glamour. She and the thousands of women who followed her to Georgia Tech over the next 50 years came for an outstanding education. And like all good Tech students, they worked hard; they persevered; they overcame the challenges Tech placed before them; and in the end they “got out” and went on to contribute to society in important and meaningful ways that have made us proud.

There have been many firsts for women at Georgia Tech since 1952, and tonight we are going to celebrate 50 of them. But as the program after dinner takes us through the first 50 years of women at Tech, I hope each of you will also have the next 50 years in mind, and be thinking of ways to make them even more spectacular than the first 50. Some of you attended the forum this afternoon where we discussed the challenges that still face women at a technological university and the ways we can make our campus more hospitable for women.

That discussion made it clear that the issue of educating women to be leaders in technological fields is much bigger than Georgia Tech. And we are actually doing quite well compared to many of our peer institutions. The national workforce in science and technology is largely male, and a perception still exists in our broader society that science, technology, engineering and mathematics are masculine endeavors. It is difficult to attract women to a technological university if they feel there is no place for them in these professions after they graduate. So we need more women who will regard tonight’s honorees as role models, and who will aspire to their own firsts in changing that perception about science and technology over the next 50 years.
Tonight, as we honor 50 important “firsts” that women have achieved at Georgia Tech, we are pleased and proud to welcome a guest speaker who has accomplished a few firsts of her own. Shirley Franklin is not a graduate of Georgia Tech – she got her bachelor’s degree from Howard University and her master’s from the University of Pennsylvania, both in sociology – but she acts like a Georgia Tech alumna. She has ventured with confidence into arenas dominated by men and become a successful leader. As Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young’s chief administrative officer, she became the nation’s first female city manager. Today she is Atlanta’s first female mayor and the first African American woman to serve as mayor of a major southern city.

Shirley’s career in public service began in 1978, when Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson appointed her commissioner of cultural affairs. She also served as executive officer for operations during Maynard Jackson’s second tenure as mayor. In 1991, she became the top-ranking female executive for the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games, known as ACOG, which she served as senior vice president for external relations. Following the Olympics, she formed Shirley Clarke Franklin & Associates, a management and consulting firm for public and community affairs and strategic planning, and in 1998 she became a majority partner in Urban Environmental Solutions, LLC.

When Roy Barnes was elected governor in 1998, she served on his three-person transition team, then was appointed to GRTA – the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority – of which she became vice-chair. The executive director of GRTA, of course, was Georgia Tech’s own Catherine Ross, from the City Planning Program in the College of Architecture, who is one of tonight’s honorees.

After Shirley Franklin was inaugurated mayor in January of 2002, she immediately tackled the large pile of problems left behind by her predecessor. She overcame a budget deficit of more than $80 million and balanced the city budget, taking a salary reduction herself and cutting the mayor’s office by half in the process. She proposed sweeping ethical reforms, which the City Council adopted. She initiated external audits of city government, focused attention on improving daily governmental operations, and repaired city relations within the metro Atlanta area, with the state, and with Georgia’s congressional delegation.

I had the privilege of chairing her Clean Water Advisory Panel, which was composed not of politicians, but of national experts in areas like water and sewer systems, urban infrastructure, and environmental issues. We recommended a plan that would exceed the requirements at a lower cost than anticipated, with reasonable construction timetable and a minimum of disruption. Shirley, to her credit, forwarded the proposal directly to the federal EPA and state EPD, before it had a chance to become a political football.

Shirley’s commitment to her community is exemplified by her active service on over 30 boards and committees – from the Atlanta Convention and Visitor’s Bureau to Spelman College… from the East Lake Community Foundation to United Way… from the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra to the National Black Arts Festival.

We are truly honored that Mayor Franklin accepted our invitation to be here with us this evening. I am pleased to welcome her and proud to introduce her at this time.
CLOSING
As you have seen this evening, Georgia Tech has been blessed with a tremendous group of talented, self-assured women among its faculty, staff, and students, who have made many valuable contributions to the Institute over the past 50 years. And I want to thank each of our honorees tonight, not just for coming and allowing us to honor you, but also for making Georgia Tech a better place by blazing new trails and opening up new doors of opportunity for women. You are truly role models for women at Georgia Tech as they continue to break new ground over the next 50 years.

I am proud that several of these firsts have occurred during my watch as president of Georgia Tech, including the first female academic dean, dean of students, registrar, and police chief. And it is my honest hope that the next 50 years of women at Tech will include the first woman president.

Thank you all for coming this evening. Drive safely and good night.