I am proud to join Bill Goodhew and Herky Harris in welcoming you to this year’s Presidents’ Dinner, which is our way of expressing our appreciation to you for making significant contributions to Roll Call, and to join together with all of you in celebrating another year that adds to the outstanding history of this great institution.

There are many things that separate Georgia Tech from the typical public university, but one of the most significant is our outstanding alumni. You continue to support us with such strong enthusiasm long after you have “gotten out.” If you look at the other nine public universities that are up there with us in the nation’s top ten, not a single one can match the level of support we get from our alumni.

Just last Saturday at the Georgia Dome not far from here we inducted over 2000 new graduates into our Alumni Association. The growth of our enrollments is changing the face of our alumni rapidly. I was surprised to learn recently that we graduated as many Ph.D’s in the past ten years as we did in the entire previous life of the Institute. At the undergraduate level, we produced as many graduates in the past 21 years as we did in the entire previous history of the Institute. For those of us who fall in the historical part of these statistics, it tells us that in spite of our grey hair and that of our classmates, and what we view as important today, Georgia Tech truly is a young university with much of its glory yet to come.

But it is more about the people than it is about the numbers. Just before graduation last Saturday, I received a moving letter from a young woman who emigrated to the U.S from China and who was to receive her Ph.D in aerospace engineering. This in itself was not remarkable, but she told me she was following in the footsteps of her two elder brothers, each of whom received their Ph.D’s from Georgia Tech in recent years. When I met with the family she told me it was her mother and father’s dream from their distant home in China to have their children educated at Georgia Tech. Their only regret was that their father had died and was not here to see this day, but they told me their dream had come true. Is that not what Georgia Tech is all about? Making dreams come true? And creating opportunity, helping young people see what is possible, improving life and offering hope – this is what our business is all about, but we often forget it, because it is happening before our eyes.

Last Saturday among the many other stories at graduation, one began when I hugged my grandniece, DeAnna Clough, as she crossed the stage. She came to Tech from the Midwest to get a masters in one of our new programs, Orthotics and Prosthetics, which is designed to use technology to help those who have lost limbs. This is one of a very small number of such programs, and DeAnna was thrilled with her experience as she looked forward to a life in which she can help others. I also met Brian Swanagan, son of Jeff Swanagan, who is the executive director of this very aquarium we are now in and who helped Bernie Marcus bring his vision to life. Brian is a mathematics major who is going to become a K-12 teacher, where he will fill a gap our nation faces as we try to educate young people in math skills. Another story of optimism
and hope among the many present that joyful day last week. These folks, and all of those who
crossed the stage, represent that intangible “dream come true, opportunity created thing” behind
the numbers.

We see this more tangibly expressed when hundreds of our students volunteer to spend a week
helping victims of Katrina rather than go on a holiday break... when we learn that Georgia Tech
and its partner, Emory University, have won one of the nation’s first centers of excellence in the
use of nanotechnology to fight cancer. We are proud to have won the competition, but this is
really about creating new hope for cancer victims through research and technology. It is also
about providing the opportunity for our students to use their powerful intellects to help
humankind.

When we learn that our science programs have made dramatic improvement in their national
rankings, it pleases those of us who have worked to plant the seeds for it. When it is announced
that we now have the 41st most powerful computer in the world to facilitate research in
developing ways to use the human genome to attack disease, we know a milestone has been
passed, particularly for our sciences. However, more importantly, these developments mean the
rapidly growing numbers of our entering students who want to major in the sciences will have
new opportunities to realize their dreams.

As we learn that 40 percent of our undergraduate students now participate in undergraduate
research, this is a statement about their intellectual growth and maturity while they are on their
way to earning their Georgia Tech degree. But more importantly it speaks to providing
opportunity, since such experiences give students a chance to work in a small group with a
famous faculty member, giving them more reason to want to learn what else Tech has to offer,
and then stay here to graduate. When we hear that our graduation rate reached 76 percent this
year, an all time high, this in turn is related to having opportunities like undergraduate research
that enrich a student’s educational experience. The higher graduation rate is about people too –
specifically, those graduates from Tech whom we might have lost in the past, but who today
receive diplomas and will be proud alumni.

In the midst of the vast shower of information that passes for news these days, last week you
might have seen programs on the morning network shows about our Aware Home. Americans
were able to see how our faculty and students are creating a new assistive technology to allow
the growing number of older citizens to live better lives and stay in their own homes for longer
periods. This is all about offering hope and the chance to enjoy life as we all imagine it might be
in our golden years.

I am sure like me, you share a sense of pride when you hear about the numbers for Tech this
year, but most especially when you learn about the human dimensions behind them. We learn
what it means to be an institution that fulfills the dreams of talented young people and the
families whose hopes ride with them.

But Georgia Tech is not a place to rest on its laurels. We are already setting a fast pace early on
for the coming year. In July we will announce, quietly, that we have already raised $250 million,
or one fourth of our $1 billion goal, in the quiet phase of our new capital campaign. By July we
will have underway the construction of one of the nation’s premier new nanotechnology research centers, since we secured the final installment of state funding of $38 million, thanks to Governor Perdue and the leadership of the General Assembly.

In just four weeks, Anne and I will have the good fortune to host an Alumni tour to France, England, Wales and Scotland, highlighted at the end by the opportunity to open a new office of the Georgia Tech Research Institute in Dublin. This comes at the invitation of, and with the support of, the Irish Government. They invited us because we know better than any university how to link research to realistic goals and then to commercialize it. Did you know Georgia Tech has created 52 new companies in the past five years? The Irish Government does, and that is one of the reasons they sought us out as partners rather than others – yet another sign of our growing global reputation.

This summer we are also offering a chance for entering freshmen to get an early start at Tech by offering a specially designed summer term for the first time since we changed to semesters. We thought we would need 200 slots, but almost 300 signed up showing we clearly tapped a nerve. Also, with the help of a group of willing student leaders, we will begin a summer reading program for incoming freshmen. Before they arrive on campus, they will be reading Jared Diamond’s best seller *Guns, Germs and Steel* – a great book that explains the interaction of cultures, societies and technology in creating the world as we know it. Once they arrive in the fall, we will have Mr. Diamond on campus to lecture on the book, and there will be small group discussions in places like the library and residence halls. Faculty will participate in these small groups, so they will foster interaction between new students and faculty outside the classroom as well as promoting curiosity in students for ideas outside the scope of their intended major. Exciting new programs like these will help retain even more of our entering class than we are doing now.

And, speaking of books, if you have a chance to pick up the new edition of Tom Friedman’s best seller, *The World is Flat*, flip to the chapter called “The Right Stuff,” and look for the section featuring Georgia Tech. It is very exciting for us to have someone of Tom Friedman’s caliber citing Georgia Tech as a university that is getting it right in this global economy of the 21st century. And it is not just in his book, but in all types of forums, that he offers praise for us as a place willing to tackle what is needed to help young Americans succeed in an uncertain future.

And speaking of tackling, when you are getting hyped up about the football clash between two historic teams early this fall, Georgia Tech and Notre Dame, remember to tell your friends that regardless of the outcome of the game, Georgia Tech is already off and running for another great year.

As you can see, Georgia Tech continues to strive for excellence and to make progress in exciting ways, and each one of you has played a key role in making it happen. Your gifts, combined with that good old Georgia Tech “can do” spirit and persistence in face of challenges, have enabled us to continue our forward progress and preparation for the future. Because of your support, our star continues to rise, and I am convinced that our best days lie ahead.
We are especially grateful to you for giving so generously to Roll Call. Roll Call helps us fill in the gaps between the designated gifts and gives us the flexibility we need to explore new directions, take advantage of unexpected opportunities, and test new ideas for improving our curriculum and our programs. Your gifts allow us to seize our opportunities and rise above the level of a good, solid school to become the standard by which others measure themselves.

On behalf of the students, faculty, and staff of Georgia Tech, I want to express my heart-felt thanks to you for joining with us as partners in our endeavors. Your love for Georgia Tech, expressed in your Roll Call contributions, enables us to rise to the challenges of our times and step forward to provide new levels of technological leadership in a changing world.