ZETA PHI BETA SPEECH

FOR

CARMELITA ROBERTS

Hello everyone! I want to welcome all of you here today and to share this year’s celebration as we acknowledge “Building on the Principles of Zeta While Blazing New Paths.” This amazing organization is almost ready to celebrate its one hundredth anniversary-although truth be told, I don’t know if a lady **ever** wants to divulge her age… (**Say that with a gesture of making a “mock secret” and wait for the laugh**) … but I have to say, in this case I am proud to be a part of this organization, one that has endured and inspired and influenced thousands of people in communities all over the country and the world, for the past ninety-four years!!! That is **REALLY** something to be proud of!! To our sisters who are present today, welcome!!! I am proud to be your partner in the endeavors we strive for here at KPB. To the distinguished guests who are here, thank you for expressing your interest in the work we do, how we do it, and what it is we stand for. To our families and friends that are here sharing this year’s festivities, **YOU** are the reason we work so hard. You inspire us every day to make a better world for future generations. We appreciate the sacrifices and challenges you endured to see to it that we would have a better life and the opportunity to have a quality education, and this organization is dedicated to all of the families and friends who are there for us, and have been, twenty-four seven.

For those of you that may not know the history of Zeta Phi Beta, it was founded on January 20, 1920 at Howard University in Washington D.C. That was an era when African Americans really began to find their voices, in the arts by way of the Harlem Renaissance and as those voices increased in volume and cadence, so did the voices of its detractors. The Klan seemed to become more present, prohibition was enacted, and the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote was finally adopted, making for an exciting, electric, and **contentious** atmosphere. They weren’t called “**The Roaring Twenties**” for nothing!! (**Wait for the laugh**)

The world might have been on the brink of evolution and revolution, but five coeds from Howard University were determined to effect positive change in the world. Their mission was to serve by example: with support, intelligence, integrity and **finer womanhood,** which is defined as "the distinguishing characteristics of a woman-one superior in kind, quality or appearance, marked by or affecting elegance or refinement.” This principle is unique to our organization. We believe that through sisterhood and service, we can support communities and each other to acknowledge the inner dignity present in all of us, and that dignity is what everyone deserves to experience and explore.

Although Zeta Phi Beta began over ninety years ago, each generation of members breathes new life and purpose relevant to the current times. At present, we have representation and outreach all over the world and we are proud to boast a membership of over 100,000!!! That’s an increase of what? **20,000%** since January 1920? I’d say we’re going in the right direction!!! But before we all pat ourselves on the back, please know that our work is far from over. Our outreach programs like Z-HOPE and the National Educational Foundation through which we provide financial assistance, to Elder Care Initiative that provides education and awareness to those entering their senior years, we are dedicated to supporting our communities. We may be living in very modern times, but there is always a neighbor or a community that needs a helping hand.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, “Service which is rendered without joy helps neither the servant nor the served. But all pleasures and possessions pale into nothingness before service which is rendered in a spirit of joy.” My sisters and I at Zeta Phi Beta truly believe that maxim, and we find that as we give, much more comes back to us. The gift is in the giving and as we find our way in this new modern age, we will maintain our original mission. We find that mission is a living, breathing entity, adaptable for contemporary causes. It is our privilege to honor the principles of Scholarship, Service, Sisterly Love, and Finer Womanhood. Thank you all!