**13826, Carlton Lampkins – keynote speech**

Collective Resources for Impact

Good Morning (evening) Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to welcome you to the annual achievement week and founders’ day. Omega Psi Phi has a long and proud history being the first international fraternal organization to be founded on the campus of a historically black college. Omega Psi Phi was founded on November 17, 1911 at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Since that time the fraternity has worked diligently to make the organization a place where young African American men can learn and grow into leaders in the world around us.

Our fraternity has had many accomplishments over the decades we have been in operation. In 1945 we undertook a National Social Action Program to meet the needs of African Americans in health, housing, civil rights and education. During the 1950’s we made social action a high priority. Omega men became actively involved in social action, participating in “sit-ins” and other civil rights demonstrations. We were also very active in voting rights for African Americans during “Operation Big Vote”. In 1979 the Denver Grand Conclave committed to contribute $250,000 to the United Negro College Fund over the next five years.

Our accomplishments have not been restricted to just improving life for African Americans in the United States. We now have more than 700 chapters in the United States, Bermuda, the Bahamas, Virgin Islands, Korea, Japan, Liberia, Germany and Kuwait. We also count a great many Omega Men who are recognized leaders in the arts, sciences, academics, athletics, business, civil rights, education and government at the local, national and international level.

The reason Omega began this organization with such strength is because our founders, Love, Cooper, Coleman and Just, were men who possessed the highest ideals and intellect. The reason we continue to flourish and grow is because the founders selected and later attracted men of similar ideals and characteristics. It is therefore no accident that many of America’s great black men have been Omega Men. I believe I can say without reservation that there are few Americans who have not been affected by some member of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity.

Every organization must have founding principles that guide it through everyday activities and major decisions. Those principles will determine the measurement of its members and the success of the organization. Omega Psi Phi has chosen as its founding principles manhood, scholarship, perseverance and uplift.

This is a fraternity so of course our members are men but just being a man by gender does not describe the principle of manhood. Manhood is more than an accident of birth. It is a standard of character that causes a man to reach for excellence. This standard requires a man to seek the best in himself and everyone he encounters. It is not achieved simply by growing older although increased age usually does help a man to develop a higher character. But, more than age is required if a man is to develop that high standard of character. Mentoring is imperative. The older men must mentor the younger ones to teach them the lessons they learned so that those lessons will continue to be passed on to each successive generation.

Scholarship is a principle that is always to be valued. For a long time the opportunity of any education, much less a higher education, was withheld from African Americans. Since those rules have changed those of us who have achieved an education have worked to increase educational opportunities to other African Americans. As more of us take advantage of those opportunities more of us can rise to a better position than the generations before us. Do you remember when you first came to college? You were all set to be the big man on campus. I remember one young man who came with quite a set of preconceived ideas. He was going to sleep late, stay up late, eat whatever he chose and only go to class when he felt like it. As the term went on he was so sure he had it all in the bag. Then, the end of the term came and one of his professors called him up to the front. He was certain he was going to be given some grand award. The professor announced his name to the students in the room and welcomed him to his first day of class, then promptly handed him a specially drawn up test just for him. The questions were taken totally from class discussion and he had two option, pass or fail. That young man never missed a day of class in his entire college career.

Perseverance is a quality that is required of anyone regardless of their goals in life. Perseverance means never giving up, never surrendering to failure no matter what trial befalls you. Not every person can achieve a higher education but every person can develop and use perseverance to improve each day of their lives. Even if you earn a higher education if you don’t add perseverance to that education your quality of life will suffer for its lack.

To uplift mean to lift up either yourself or someone else from where they stand today. It may mean to uplift them with words of encouragement. It may mean to uplift them by offering needed resources they couldn’t obtain any other way. It may also mean to uplift a person in the eyes of others. Any or all of these are important ways to meet this standard for our fraternity.

If we truly make these standards of part of our character then we can build a sense of unity in our organization. With that unity we can reach out to our community, our cities, our states, our country, and to the world at large and make them a better place.

Our fraternity has not made a habit of seeking men to join but rather men have been attracted to us because of the standards of character that we expect from our members. It is those standards that encourage men to seek membership with us. These men who already have a kernel of those standards of character come seeking the mentoring and challenges to further build and develop those character traits.

As they develop those character traits it is only natural that our members desire to go out into the world around them to put those standards of character into use. Once men have developed a strong standard of manhood it becomes integral to their identity. It is no longer something listed on a commitment letter or something they aspire to achieve. It is part of who they are. Every decision they make, every goal they set and every statement they issue will stem from that character.

Once a man has experienced a higher education he couldn’t consider his children settling for anything less. Once he sees the value of scholarship he will do all he can to increase the opportunities for scholarship to the generations who come after him. He will not only do all he can so his own children can enjoy those opportunities he will also go out into the world and do all he can to make those opportunities available to those in his community and the world around him.

Perseverance is very different from scholarship. You can’t take a college course in perseverance. This is a character trait that can only be learned through life lessons. Only be being challenged and then required to overcome those challenges can a person learn to persevere. Through formal study and learning life lessons a person discovers their desires in life. Perseverance is the character trait that gives you the determination to strive to reach your life goals no matter what. As perseverance develops and grows a person learns to stand their ground and continue seeking truth and learning and accomplishment. By their very example of living a life of perseverance they teach those who come after them that achieving their goals and dreams is possible if only they persevere.

As we travel through life we will learn that no matter how much education we earn and no matter how much perseverance we develop we will all have limits to what we can achieve. No one can do everything. That means we must combine our talents and resources with others to reach the goals of our community and sometimes for ourselves. It may mean combining financial resources or physical resources. It may mean combining talents and skills. It may mean combing all of them to make our community a better place for us, for our children and for the world around us.

Once we realize that we must work together to combine our resources we also must learn to leverage those resources. It’s not just a matter of throwing them all into a hat and drawing them out as we need them. It means having good leadership who knows how to plan and organize individual and group projects so that those resources are used to their greatest advantage. A man may possess multiple resources but which one is his greatest resources. Good leaders will develop the skill to recognize each person’s greatest talents and use them to the best advantage.

There’s an old joke that in the army they will find out what you do best and assign you to do the exact opposite. An example is a man who is a fine chef but the army puts him on the line as a foot soldier. A man I know worked as an intern one term as part of his degree program. He was training to be an attorney. The business owner set him to work cleaning out the gutters of his building. The young man asked him why he was given this task since it had nothing to do with his studies. The owner told him, “Son, attorneys have to learn how to dig through a lot of dirt before they come to the truth in any legal case. You might as well start from the beginning learning how to dig out the dirt.” A good leader would see this man’s true talent and put him in a position to use it for himself, for his career and for the world around him.

Our theme this year is The Power of We, Working Together for Progress. By combining all the attributes of character and the principles of the Fraternity we can accomplish great things. No man can stand alone and accomplish very much but if we stand together and pool our resources, our talents, our experience, as well as our goals and dreams we can accomplish more than we could have imagined. The combined strength of us working together isn’t just the addition of all those things it’s the exponential multiplication of all those pieces to the grand puzzle of life. By all of us working together in the United States and in other countries we can make a present and a future that is better for all of us and for the world we live in.

I encourage each of you today to develop your character as well as your best skills and talents. Find yourself a mentor to help you put those skills and talents to work. You will not only fulfill your own goals and desires of your life but you will enrich those around you.

Thank you