AWARDS PRESENTATION SPEECH

FOR

CLAUDE AMERSON

Hello everyone! What a great convention this is!! As a member of CISCA, tonight’s event is traditionally a wonderful occasion to come together, celebrate, and acknowledge those who have inspired, motivated, and encouraged us. On a daily basis we all do whatever we can to manage and improve our effectiveness in life and in industry, and it is at junctures like this that we have the opportunity to reflect and recognize outstanding commitment and performance. As you all know, the high point of our year … at least in **MY** eyes, is this convention and ultimately participating in this awards ceremony. I am particularly happy to be here as I am proud to present this year’s DeGelleke Award. This award is named for one of CISCA’s founders, Gerry DeGelleke, and it is presented to a member in recognition of his or her outstanding achievements and contributions for the purpose of advancing our association and industry. This year’s DeGelleke Award recipient is someone who embodies commitment to this organization and industry, and is exceptional in every way. I also have the privilege of calling this person a wonderful friend (**If you want to make a joke you can say**). Before you all start to volunteer to wash my car and walk my dogs or water my plants or let me win at golf… you get the picture… please keep this in mind… I consider **ALL** of you my friends…. and we, the committee have already locked down the lucky honoree!! (**Wait for the laugh**).

Each year members of the executive committee are charged with the mandate to choose worthy candidates. The committee has the arduous task of going through lists of members, all with admirable and enviable qualities and talents, so you can imagine how tough it is to complete the vetting process. Believe me, and I can tell you without any reservations, serving on the committee is not an easy task. When you think of it, the committee winds up knee deep in sorting through accomplishments, quantifiable advancements, and piles and piles of records, notes, dossiers and testimonies, all to find the individual who personifies the greatness to which we aspire. Vince Lombardi once said, “The quality of a person’s life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor.” I know from first hand experience that tonight’s award winner embodies a commitment to excellence.

I’d like to share a little bit about my personal experience and how I got to know this year’s recipient. We first met in New Orleans. We were about to embark on our “maiden voyage,” that is we were going to enter our first meeting as junior members of the Board of Directors. I remember we didn’t have much time to get to know each other during that meeting… after all, we were there for a specific purpose and as the “new kids,” it was our mandate to pay attention and absorb the procedures and discussions. In retrospect I think we both were probably a bit reserved… I know I was, but sometimes one knows when a person is special and it wasn’t too long after that meeting that I figured out this guy was… and is… exceptional.

I’m the kind of person that likes to spend time with smart people…(**if you want** **you can say**) … **present company included**…(**and wait for the laugh**) so I didn’t allow too much time to pass without getting to know him. I waited a little bit, you know, giving us both time to entertain the thought of each other as acquaintances, and I set the bait to get to know him personally. I extended an invitation to visit Scottsdale to play a little golf or to San Diego for some boating… Sounds like a plan… What could be bad? Apparently nothing!! Within about six months he paid that visit to Scottsdale. And that was just the beginning of a wonderful friendship that has extended well beyond a few rounds of golf in Scottsdale. It now includes our families as well. It’s true. Our honoree has a commitment to excellence in every phase of his life, including friendship!

We are beginning to have a glimpse into the traits and characteristics that define our Award recipient, but to paraphrase a well-known documentarian, “Give me the child and I will show you the man.” So… If we had the ability to time travel just a bit, and if we could take a view through the looking glass to see what formed a man this dedicated, committed and powerful, what would we see? Well, we’d find ourselves looking at life in Westfield, New Jersey. Legend has it that he was… and is a wonderful son. He was a dedicated Cub Scout, devoted to sports, and in particular wrestling and football, and memory serves to remind us that even way back then he began to exhibit strong and admirable leadership qualities…. So far so good, right? Well let’s keep in mind that even titans in business have skeletons… or **brownies**… in their closets. He might be magnificent today, but like a bad Facebook profile picture, some things just continue to haunt one’s good name and reputation. (**Wait for the laugh**). It may not have seemed like much at the time, but with one brief sentence, our honoree set his legacy. It all goes back to when he was just three years old. What grandma has the strength to resist a little boy asking for brownies? No one we might know!!! So one day, Grandma went over to her precious grandson’s home with a nice big plate of delicious warm brownies. With a reach that could impress Pat Riley or Phil Jackson, our little angel reached across the table once… and then **again**… as he poised himself to demolish his **SECOND** brownie, he paused, looked Grandma straight in the eye and said, “You can go now Grandma.” (**Say that with a little enthusiasm and wait for the laugh**). That phrase has become his family’s running gag line. “You can go now” is invoked on a frequent and “as needed” basis. No matter this man’s insights or accomplishments, this will be his legacy. And may no man, woman or child come between our honoree and his brownies!

Other life events have colored and distinguished his early years and young adulthood, but soon after the Brownie incident came the “Peacock caper.” The occasion was a family holiday at Busch Gardens. Our man of the moment was a wide-eyed four year old just waiting to seize the day and live it up in Tampa. The family came upon some peacocks and his mother thought you-know-who would look really great in a picture with some white peacocks. As his mommy encouraged the set up of the Kodak moment, she coaxed and directed, “Closer, closer, closer…” All of a sudden one of the birds gave our little trouper a peck on the cheek. Apparently the peacocks did **NOT** get the message, “You can go now” and to this day, someone in this room is still wary of a peck or kiss on his cheek. Let’s put it this way… when congratulating him on his achievement tonight, may I suggest a warm handshake and a pat on the back? (**Wait for the** **laugh**).

We all have our childhood stories and scars. The thing that distinguishes the good from the great is that the latter learns, grows, and laughs. Our man has done all of that. Following a colorful collegiate career at Bucknell University, he was one of only five students nationwide to be selected to join the American Express Company. He then followed his destiny and legacy and joined his family business. The company is proud to mark over a century in the construction field and this year’s DeGelleke recipient has been president for over two decades. His impact on the company’s growth and success is considerable and its outreach over the past twenty plus years has been dramatic. His wisdom and innate leadership skills guide the company ever onward and he does it with intelligence, grace and vision… Just don’t peck him on the cheek while he’s eating a brownie… (**Wait for the laugh**).

A man of his measure and stature doesn’t stay single for long, and when he was a junior at Bucknell, destiny played a part in cementing the future for this scion. As luck would have it, and probably as it would play out in a great romantic movie, our honoree glanced across a crowded cafeteria and spotted **HER**…a fetching sophomore transfer student from Penn State. There are two things I have to mention at this point:

1. Whoever said there’s nothing worthwhile in a school cafeteria doesn’t know this love story for the ages.
2. I **TOLD** you he was and is **SMART!!** (**Wait for the laugh**).

We do not know if they shared brownies at that first meeting but we **DO** know the rest is history. They finished college, toured the country, spent time camping in many beautiful national parks, and wound up in San Francisco for over a year. They moved back to the east coast in 1987 so that our recipient could begin his tenure at his family’s business.

Our happy couple married in 1988, settled in Elizabeth, New Jersey and took advantage of their proximity to New York. Like two crazy kids in the best candy store in the world, they indulged in the culture and excitement of the Big Apple…. of course you-know-who probably wished it was called the **Big Brownie**… but I digress…. (**Wait for the laugh**). From attending Broadway shows on the Great White Way to cheering on the Knicks … yes… hard to believe but they actually won games back then … (**Wait for the laugh**)… to dining with friends at the great spots, this “power couple” embodied the catch phrase of the time, **“YUPPIE.”** That meant “Young Urban Professional” and to these two the world was their oyster.

With a move to the Jersey shore in the early mid-nineties, there was but one frontier yet to conquer, and in March of 1996, a son was born. Our DeGelleke recipient and his wife joyously welcomed the baby and our hero found his calling. He has been a wonderful father from the very beginning and absolutely relishes being a dad and encouraging his son (**Do you want to say his name? I have not used names as you said the family wants to build to a big reveal**… **This is why I didn’t mention his wife’s name**). Early on the child exhibited a love of baseball and from T-ball through Little League, travel teams, and right through to his senior year in high school, our hero brought his team building skills and knowledge to support his son’s involvement in sports. He even served as his son’s grade school assistant coach in baseball and basketball. Whether he was hitting FUNGOs to the boys, reffing Saturday morning instructional basketball games, or working on throwing skills in the field, this Super Dad was all in and his son loved it!

Thanks to great genes and wonderful parents, this young man is now a freshman at the University of Pennsylvania. He s a talented and dedicated student… as is evidenced by his absence tonight… It’s finals week and he understands the importance of a great education in order to succeed in life. We wish him all the luck in the world.

There is so much more that can be said in praise of our honoree… so I will go on just a bit more. He **LOVES** to play golf… any time… anywhere… I flatter myself thinking that he made that first golf trip because he wanted to get to see a bit of Scottsdale and engage in heavy business conversation, but nah… it was the golf!! (**Wait for the laugh**). He’s taken a swing from Ireland to Oregon and all points in between. And fortunately his game is a little better than Hank Aaron’s who once said about the sport, “It took me seventeen years to get 3,000 hits in baseball. I did that in one afternoon on the golf course.” (**Wait for the laugh**). He loves photography and wine and has become quite the enthusiast. He is always up for a discussion on the merits of a particular vintage and peppers his conversations with comments about bouquets and aromas while contemplating if it’s time to “decant” or “let it rest.”

He may let the wine rest but he is filled with kinetic energy. He is generous to a fault and over the years has worked tirelessly with many charities. He donates time and considerable resources to the Multiple Sclerosis Society. Through his bike squad he has raised tens of thousands of dollars for the MS society and his team was even named “Team of the Year” for the MS Coast the Coast charity ride in 2001. He also contributes his time and considerable financial acumen in serving as a member of the foundation Board of Trustees of Trinitas Hospital in Elizabeth New Jersey.

In his “spare” time… hahaha… like there’s any spare time for him, this very special man has made an indelible impression on CISCA. Since joining the board in 2001 he has made his mark in a myriad of ways. He has either chaired or participated on various working committees:

· Served on Committee to recruit and hire three different Executive

 Directors.

· Education committee.

· Membership committee

· Co-Chaired with Tom Edens, a past president and DeGelleke recipient, to

 translate the ceilings system handbook to Spanish.

· In 2004 he formed and chaired the strategic planning committee

· Served on convention committees

· Supported and attended various CISCA programs including annual golf

 tournament.

· During his leadership as Secretary/Treasurer on the executive committee,

 he recognized the financial challenges facing the association and worked

 with the executive committee to resolve the immediate cash flow

 challenge. He then worked with the executive committee and the

 executive director and made recommendations to restructure the finances placing the association on a path to financial stability and health. This

 was no easy task. I know because I was a part of the team at the time.

I think it can be said today that had he not taken the ball and run with it, the association could have had a financial meltdown.

When I began speaking to you, you may have wondered who tonight’s honoree might be. I am sure by now you realize there is really only one person who fits the description, who has made such far-reaching contributions to his life, his family, his friends, his community and of course, this organization. Ladies and gentlemen, we are so privileged to have this fantastic guy in our lives and association. It gives me great pleasure to present this year’s DeGelleke Award to the one and only…. (**Do you want to make a little pun and say**) Let’s **RAISE THE ROOF** for Tom Jacobson!