**INTRODUCTION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**JUNE HARRIS**

To all of you... friends, family, colleagues and classmates, distinguished guests, educators, and members of our community, I would like to welcome all of you here today as we dedicate this marker in remembrance and gratitude to those who walked before us and did what they could, in ways large and small, to make this world a better place in which to live. We are all here, without exception, thanks to the legacy left to us, and today we honor the conscience, activism, legacy, and footprint of Julius Rosenwald. Like so many communities in North Carolina and throughout the United States, through the years its composition has changed and evolved and through the acts of conscience and concern of others, we find ourselves at this point in history.

“Pentimento” is a term used to describe an elusive yet powerful condition... it calls out the “layering of time.” It reminds us that the ground upon which we now stand held other buildings, different lives, and older circumstances from which we have all evolved. Before our parents and predecessors arrived, this was farmland... tilled by slaves... witnessing ignorance, oppression, and a yearning for freedom, **knowledge**, and a better life for all. In the early twentieth century, Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington addressed a crisis and went to work...funding and building educational infrastructure where it was needed most. One of those original Rosenwald Schools was right here, on this site, and years ago.... (**If you want to make a joke, you can say**).... Okay... not **THAT** many years ago... (**and wait for the laugh**), I was a student at the McBride Colored School. I cannot imagine what our lives would have been like without the vision that brought us here today.

I would like to thank the dedicated group of local leaders that secured the funding for the Rosenwald Community Center, and to the Camden County Board of Commissioners and an Anonymous Donor for their generosity and vision in funding this marker. Our predecessors live on in the articulation of this memorial.

As we unveil this marker, I would like to pay a special tribute as we all acknowledge Mr. Jake Mitchell, Ms. Chiquita Mitchell, and Mr. Scott, for all of their hard work and devotion in honoring the past, serving the community, and considering the future for all of us.

Marian Wright Edelman said, “Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it.” Throughout history, we have all received gifts, and whether we realize it or not, those “gifts” force us to evolve. Whether they appear beneficial at first or wrapped in struggle and divisiveness, every action, reaction, and condition in life pushes us towards change. While the McBride Colored School did not physically survive over the years, it’s legacy has brought us here. The marker we dedicate today is much more than a footnote, etched in history. It’s a reminder of what stood here, through all of those no longer visible layers of history. Its purpose, as a beacon, is to make us think.... to learn of.... to honor those that paved the way and planted the seeds so that we might be able to gather today, prepared to make **THIS** world a better place.

While “community” is comprised of infrastructure, it is nothing without the strength, wisdom, and determination of its people. We know that the farms and buildings and schools that stood here, before we inherited our legacy, are ghosts in our own time machine, but we **cannot** forget how we got here and we **MUST NOT** lose sight of where we are going and of the world we will leave as **OUR** legacy. It will be through learning of our past and honoring our predecessors that we will gain the strength and wisdom to conquer the adversaries that might threaten our future collective health and voice. It is thanks to the vision of people like Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington, and so many others, that we have overcome, but the struggle is never ending. In years to come, the “pentimento” assigned to this very spot will become even more layered, and it will include the work we all do as a collective force... it will include the path we leave for our children and theirs, and it will also include this marker... that tells a story... that brings to light the world that was, so that the future knows what existed, what was conquered, and what **CANNOT** be allowed to be reversed.

More than “democracy dies in darkness,” as one news source reminds us. It is up to each one of us to continue searching for, and shining a light, through **education**, truth, awareness, and knowledge. Thank you all for partnering and for caring!!