

I. Intro

- Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. For those of you who are new to our organization, I'm Mark Walker, President of the Texas Exes Houston Chapter, and it is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to the Heart of Texas Excellence Celebration.
- I want to thank you all for joining us on what I am sure will be an unforgettable evening. Tonight we will be endowing a brand-new Texas Exes Houston Chapter Scholarship in the name of one of our most distinguished members: Dr. James T. Willerson.
- For more than four decades, Dr. Willerson has championed the cause of education as one of the medical communities' most prolific luminaries: a teacher, author, researcher, and leader. His magnificent career epitomizes our university's commitment to service and excellence, and I cannot think of a more worthy name to associate with our latest scholarship endowment. Dr. Willerson, welcome. And thank you.

[pause for applause]

- Joining me in hosting this evening's festivities is Christi Myers ... *[brief background on Christi]*
- We do have a full agenda this evening, so please enjoy this wonderful meal from the chefs here at the River Oaks Country Club while we proceed with our program.
- On behalf of the Texas Exes Houston Chapter, I also want to take this opportunity to commend all those who made this exquisite evening possible:

- Many thanks to our distinguished chairs: Sabra Phillips, Marsha Gilbert, Stephanie Magers and Crystal Mendell
- Also to our Host Committee, without whose commitment and leadership we would not be here tonight: Denton Cooley, Jim Dannenbaum, David Grimes, Brad and Sara Howell, Bob and Elyse Lanier, Walter Mischer, Jr., Mike and Melinda Perrin, Beth Robertson, and Wallace Wilson
- Very special thanks to the countless volunteers who happily dedicated their time to the cause of bringing us all together tonight in the name of Texas education, especially ... *[single out volunteers who have gone “above and beyond” and point out their contributions]*
- We thank the River Oaks Country Club, for this beautiful setting and outstanding menu,
- And our very generous sponsors, especially ... *[name key sponsors]*
- Finally, I want to extend a personal note of thanks to our honored guest speakers, who have taken time out of their very demanding schedules to be here with us tonight.

II. Address

- Quick show of hands: How many of you have heard the phrase “times are tough” or something similar within the last 48 hours?

[pause a few seconds as hands go up]

- Quite a few. I know I have.
- And that’s why I am so inspired to see such an amazing turnout this evening and the abundance of generosity that’s being shown.
- Inspired, but hardly surprised.
- Because my fellow chapter members and I know that even in the toughest of times, we can count on our Texas Exes to come through in the name of education.
- Even those among us who graduated decades ago—not naming any names, of course—still experience and appreciate the vital role that a University of Texas education has played in our lives. And rain or shine, we will do whatever it takes to ensure that future generations can also benefit from this remarkable gift.
- Our two distinguished speakers this evening come from very different backgrounds—Ambassador Willeford from diplomacy and public service, Dr. Willerson from medicine—yet they both embody a principle that all of us Exes hold dear: that with faith and perseverance, one person can make a difference, regardless of the odds.

- And even though it sometimes appears that cynicism and doubt have taken over in these “tough times” of ours, we continue to hear stories that reaffirm the faith we all share in the power of an individual with a dream. In other words, we continue to hear stories about people who “get it.”
- For example, we’ve seen a virtually unknown film director turn a story of the most unlikely of heroes—an orphan from the streets of Mumbai—into an international phenomenon.
 - Initially, the studios doubted the film’s commercial prospects, and it narrowly escaped a straight-to-DVD release.
 - But director Danny Boyle and the team behind *Slumdog Millionaire* believed that their film, a tribute to the power of love and hope, deserved better.
 - And when all was said and done, they walked away with no fewer than eight Academy Awards, including the prize for Best Picture.
 - Danny Boyle gets it.
- We’ve also seen a young NFL head coach, in only his second year on the job, take his team from the bottom of the pack all the way to the Super Bowl.
 - For years the Arizona Cardinals were regarded as a joke across the National Football League.
 - They hadn’t had a winning season since 1998.
 - They had a 37-year-old quarterback whom many deemed too old to compete.

- But head coach Ken Whisenhunt knew this was his year to prove the naysayers wrong. After squeaking their way into the playoffs, his team went on to beat opponent after opponent under extraordinary odds, and came within five points of winning a national championship.
- Ken Whisenhunt gets it.
- And most recently, we saw an unassuming, 47-year-old singer march out onto a stage in Glasgow, Scotland, to face a hostile, sneering crowd. She was there to do one thing and one thing only: to sing her heart out.
 - What followed was a performance that brought the crowd to its feet and a worldwide audience to tears ... not to mention pushing the servers on YouTube to their limits and inspiring an entire planet.
 - Susan Boyle gets it.
- It's not like any of these individuals didn't know or understand the odds against them. They most certainly did. And they just didn't care.
- Because when you have mission, a dream, a vision, ... and you pledge your life to it and it guides your every step, every moment of every day ... then adversity just doesn't stand a chance.
- I feel that this same can-do spirit is alive and well with us tonight. Each of us here knows that with faith and determination, we can accomplish great things individually. And when we come together as a group with a singular goal, we are unstoppable.

III. Closing

- I continue to be both honored and humbled by the opportunity to serve as president of the Texas Exes Houston Chapter. I continue to appreciate the privilege of working side-by-side with the extraordinary individuals and committed leaders who make up our membership. And I continue to be inspired by the tireless spirit of our organization.
- I want to thank you again for joining us tonight, on this very special occasion, and for the generosity you have shown ... and, hopefully, will continue to show throughout the evening.
- But most of all, I thank you for your dedication and enthusiasm in supporting the mission of the Texas Exes: to Praise, Promote and Protect the University of Texas ... today, tomorrow, and for many, many years to come. Thank you.

[pause for thunderous applause and frantic check-writing]

- Now to introduce our first distinguished speakers, it's my pleasure to present my co-host for this evening, Christi Myers.