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ACADEMY OF ACHIEVEMENT Young People Join a 'Salute to Excellence'

By PALMINA STEPHENS

Brian Reynolds, cotton windbreaker zipped to the chin, scurries around the second level of the Bonaventure, directing a teen-age boy to the San Diego Room, showing another where he could pick up his registration packet, telling a young girl about her weekend itinerary.

Generally, Reynolds is the center of a milling crowd of teen-agers whose name-tags announce that they are here for the American Academy of Achievement's "Salute to Excellence." He is executive director of the academy and for the past 19 years has been putting together its program. Such phrases — "Salute to Excellence," "gathering of the greats," "Captains of Achievement," "Banquet of the Golden Plate" — become integral part of his vocabulary as he discusses the academy. So do superlatives.

Everyone Is Impressed

"Each year we present a most meaningful program, with the most electrifying, the most spectacular series of events, and everyone goes home impressed," he explains, "but the public knows nearly nothing about us."

While dedicated to promoting the achievements of others, the academy itself is little known. The irony is not lost on Reynolds. The driving force behind the Academy, Reynolds heads for his room to change. "I got up at 4," he apologizes. "I've been going ever since, never did get dressed." He unzips the top of his windbreaker to reveal the beige collar of his pajamas underneath.

He does, however, stop long enough to explain some of the aims of the academy. It is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization whose purpose is "to inspire youth with new dreams of achievement; to salute all men who give their best efforts to their daily tasks; to champion the spirit of free enterprise and equal opportunity for all; to foster an international spirit of understanding by annually bringing together the great minds and talents of other nations."

These "great minds" of today are brought together to share their experiences and their knowledge with those of tomorrow during the three-day event, which was held last weekend in Los Angeles for the first time...

The publicity about the academy — what little there was — was not always positive during the early years, a fact that Reynolds attributes to his real name.

"I was Hy Peskin when I started this thing," he admitted, a famous photographer for Life and Sports Illustrated.

"After photographing the greats of America, I wanted to bring them all together." Then he added, "Only a kid from the slums could have had such a dream."

For several years, he doggedly pursued the concept of gathering and honoring distinguished personalities until finally, in late 1960, a few civic leaders agreed with him.

The first "Salute to Excellence," featuring the Banquet of the Golden Plate, was held Sept. 9, 1961, in Monterey, Calif.

Those beginning years, though, were personally disastrous for the photographer from Brooklyn. He financed everything himself, holding the academy together by only "a shoestring" — and the income from his freelance photography. His project became all-consuming. Not only was there no money but nobody would believe that his motives were pure...

The Turning Point

The turning point came in 1966 with the first outside financial assistance. It was then, also, that the "famous photographer" disappeared.

"I ran away from the confusion my name was creating," he said. "People thought I was after something to further my career. So I destroyed Hy Peskin and invented Brian Blaine Reynolds, taking the middle names of my three sons."



Valerie Vigoda, David Glassner and Lily Rin surround Edward Teller.

Those sons, plus the rest of the family, work with Reynolds for an entire year putting the program together. Each family member has a specific job to do, even third-generation members like granddaughter Stephanie, 14, who passed out registration packets to the incoming students. Basically, though, two men run the academy. The youngest son, Wayne is 23, in his last year of law school at Pepperdine, coordinates the activities and events, while the energetic, elder Reynolds "chases the dollars" that make possible the annual program...

Thirty patrons of the academy finance the bulk of the \$400,000 budget, with direct contributions also coming from past and present honorees, large corporations, the local business community in the host cities and home-town sponsors.

George W. Jenkins, executive committee chairman of Publix Super Markets, Inc., has been sponsoring six young people from Florida ever since he became a Golden Plate awardee in 1966. The students received complimentary air fare, hotel and meal accommodations and the program/yearbook.

"We pay for everything, even a corsage for the girl and tux rentals for the boys," Jenkins said. "I would say we average about \$600 per student."

4 'wiz kids' speak with an earlier prodigy

Hydrogen bomb's inventor
says there are no geniuses

The exchange of ideas also occurred in smaller, less formal situations. Two of the honor students, Beth Osiason of Tampa and Lisa L. Pate of Huntington Beach, especially appreciated Friday morning's breakfast, when Teller, a 1961 honoree, and his wife, joined the girls, initiating a lively discussion on the positive attributes of nuclear energy.

Friday afternoon, the achievers — students and adults — trekked to the Bel Air estate of the lake Conrad Hilton to carry on the informal talks and enjoy a Mexican-style picnic.

The weekend festivities culminated Saturday evening in the Banquet of the Golden Plate, co-hosted by J. Robert Fluor, chairman and president of Fluor Corp., and Dr. Armand Hammer, board chairman of Occidental Petroleum Corp., and narrated by Edward Asner — all three past recipients.

The past and present honorees, the patrons of the academy, the "whiz kids" and teen-agers sat at an extended, 300-foot dais that almost encircled the Bonaventure's California Room to watch, with other invited guests, as 38 men and women received the Golden Plate Award.

Reynolds, dressed now in black-tie attire, relaxed a little over dinner. Family members took over some of his duties, a daughter-in-law escorted honorees to center stage, a son handed out the framed golden plates. The Banquet of the Golden Plate was running smoothly. The weekend was almost over.

'Very Positive'

Those superlatives that Reynolds tossed about earlier to describe the program were matched by some of the honorees. The students added "fantastic" and "fabulous." La Lanne, a past awardee, called it "positive, very positive." All the participants echoed Joseph C. Canizaro's comment that "I leave gaining much more than I gave."

But as for publicity, William Judkins wasn't sure it was such a good idea. "If everyone knew about what the academy is doing, they'd have to hold the weekend at the Rose Bowl."

A locally based developer, Ernest W. Hahn, of the Hahn Property Management Corp., sponsors 80 youngsters, one male and one female high school honor student from each of the 40 cities in which he has a shopping mall.

The Coca-Cola Co. is another sponsoring organization, responsible for bringing 10 students to the academy each year.

"We have done this for the last four year, ever since J. Paul Austin, chairman of the board, was honored," said William S. Judkins, vice president.

"It is no longer Brian Reynolds financing the entire operation," Judkins said. "Now there is enough corporation funding so the academy is on a sound financial basis."

Financial security makes possible the three-day, all-expense-paid weekend of seminars, dinners, awards and the mingling of notables of all ages. The adults attending the opening program could have been lifted directly from the pages of "Who's Who" — the Hon. John J. Sirica, Olivia de Havilland, Dr. Edward Teller, Gen. C. E. Yeager; Jack La Lanne, Canada's Ambassador to Iran Kenneth D. Taylor, director of the CIA Adm. Stansfield Turner, cartoonist Charles M. Schulz.

'Whiz Kids'

The young people also have known achievement. In attendance was an array of high school honor students, state and national champions of America's top youth competitions and eight "whiz kids" with genius IQs of between 180 and 200:

David Glassner, 13, has a paper route, a Norwegian elkhound and a perfect 800 on the math portion of his college-entrance exams.

Li-hsien Rin knew the alphabet at six months and was doing second grade math and reading a children's encyclopedia by age 2.

Elizabeth Robinson, 15, entered the University of Washington three years ago with a major in physics and mathematics and, after 89 graded credits, has a 3.84 grade point average.

All of the more than 350 students were the center of one session as both Sirica and Schulz gave short introductory talks.

The sharing continued as more honorees arrived to participate in the seminars, subjecting themselves to a barrage of questions.