

[New Search](#) • [Return to results](#) • [Printer-friendly view](#)**San Antonio Express-News****Generation's excellence draws a four-star salute****Author:** Bridget Gutierrez EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER**Section:** A Section**Published:** May 5, 2001

Never in his wildest dreams had Chris Patterson, an 18-year-old who wants to be a naval officer, imagined he'd have lunch with one four-star general, let alone two.

But that's exactly what happened this week when the Maine native visited San Antonio for an exclusive, four-day summit.

"I was just sitting here and they came and sat down!" Patterson said. "I was like, 'Wow! This is impressive!'"

Patterson and roughly 300 other high school students from across the country came to the Alamo City on Thursday for the 40th annual "Salute to Excellence," an exclusive event that brings together acclaimed writers, esteemed scientists, corporate titans, decorated military leaders and former heads of state to pass along their wisdom to a generation of fledging leaders.

Friday, the San Antonio Express-News received special access to the event, which is normally restricted to participants and is closely monitored by police and Secret Service agents. (**SEE CORRECTION**)

"The Wall Street Journal wrote an article about (the event) and they called it the most glittering gathering that nobody knows," said Wayne Reynolds, president of the American **Academy of Achievement**, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit group that sponsors the event.

"The last thing these people need is more publicity."

Founded in 1961, the academy was the brainchild of Reynolds's father, Brian Reynolds, who got the idea of bringing together luminaries from disparate fields to network from his work as a celebrity photographer for Life magazine.

Each year several dozen "superachievers" are inducted into the academy. Today, there are roughly 1,000 members, including Maya Angelou, George and Barbara Bush, Michael Jordan, jazz musician Wynton Marsalis, Martha Stewart and Nobel prize winner Elie Wiesel.

"The thing we'd like to get across (to students) is: These people are just like me," Reynolds said. "I may not win a Nobel Prize, but I could be a great doctor!"

Students are chosen from a vast network of educational institutions and scholarship foundations. Selection is not based solely on academic achievement, but it's clear from the question-and-answer sessions that these students are top-notch.

"There's very few events that you can go to where at the end of it you feel very good," said retired Gen. John Shalikashvili, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who was inducted into the academy in 1994.

"You can't spend time with ... these students without coming away with a feeling that our country's really in good hands."

Over the course of the summit, students might hear from some of the country's most successful businessmen or question a panel made up of some of the greatest minds in American medicine.

Friday morning students peppered just such a group with questions about the ethics of human cloning, the hazards of bioengineering, the merits of socialized medicine and the medical arguments for and against abortion.

"These students have good questions and seem to be so mature and well-directed," said Dr. Benjamin Carson, a world-renowned neurosurgeon whose son was participating in the summit. "It's good to get out there and say something that will get them thinking on their own."

At a posh downtown hotel Friday afternoon, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, county singer Naomi Judd, local businessman B.J. "Red" McCombs, Amazon.com founder Jeffrey Bezos and poet Rita Dove lunched with students over salad, chicken breast and iced tea.

"It's cool to see famous people you can just talk to ... and they won't stick their bodyguard on you," said Mike Gilmore, a 17-year-old from Philadelphia. "I had never heard of the American **Academy of Achievement** before ... but I've met a

whole bunch of people that I think I'll contact once I get out of college."

Despite high security surrounding the event - a bulletproof limousine was parked conspicuously outside, and Secret Service agents blocked every exit - the atmosphere was relaxed, with speakers sharing personal anecdotes and often speaking without notes.

Still, some of the students, including Chris Patterson, were a bit star-struck.

"You can sit in class and talk about issues," he said, "but when there are people that you're learning about in class sitting right in front of you, talking to you, that's pretty amazing."

bgutierrez@express-news.net

Illustration: CHRIS BIRCK/Special to the Express-News CHRIS BIRCK/Special to the Express-News

Jeffrey Bezos, CEO of Amazon.com, (right) talks with Dr. Sylvia Earle, who specializes in undersae exploration, at the summit. Dr. Andrew Weil (right) talks with students Zachery Safir (from left), Evan Schartz and Jeremiah Yu outside La Villita Assembly Hall.

Copyright 2001 San Antonio Express-News

Archives Technical and Billing questions: For questions regarding your Archives account, please send an email to newslibrary@newsbank.com.

MYSA

Home
News
Blogs
Business
Sports
Columnists
Editorials
Education
Entertainment
Forums

Life

Events Calendar
Multimedia
National/International
Obituaries
Politics
Travel
Traffic
Weather
Food
Spurs

TOPICS

Community
Health
Living Green SA
Military
Outdoors
Visitors' Guide
SA Paws
SA Cultura

MARKETPLACE

Autos
Classifieds
Jobs
Real Estate
Shopping
Business Directory
Fan Shop

COMMUNITY SUBMITTED

Calendar
Photos

OTHER EDITIONS

e-Edition
Mobile
Facebook
Follow us on Twitter

ABOUT US

About Us
Contact Us
Advertise online
Advertise in print
Newspaper Delivery
Place a classified ad
EN Subscription Services
Buy Photos
Archives
Privacy Policy
Terms and Conditions

© 2012 Hearst Communications Inc.

HEARST newspapers