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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Grand basileus to Zetas at Founders' Day: 'Tenacity. That is our legacy'

SALISBURY, NC – Waves of blue-and-white-clad sisters of the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc. filled Trent Gymnasium at Livingstone College. Every now and then a wave would crest at the sight of sorors not seen in ages and rush to embrace the long-time friends. January 16 was the sorority's founders' day celebration and Livingstone College hosted a luncheon in honor of the organization's 84th anniversary. Members from all over the state and surrounding locations gathered at the college to celebrate the courage, wisdom and tenacity of their five "pearls," or founders, and their vision.

Dr. Algeania Freeman, president of Livingstone College and a member of the sorority, welcomed the group's international grand basileus, Dr. Barbara Moore, whose day job is vice president for Institutional Advancement at Benedict College in Columbia, SC.

"You know this has to be a great lady who can lead other women, 'cause you know us," Freeman quipped. She followed with a more serious tone, expressing her admiration for Moore, saying when she met the grand basileus the night before the luncheon, she told God that Moore is so gracious "that you just want to sit at her feet and listen to the wisdom that has been imbued in her."

As a member of the sorority and a college administrator, Freeman thanked Moore for encouraging women to be civic minded by moving the organization toward more community service-oriented work with programs Moore has instituted including signature program Z-HOPE – Zetas Helping Other People Excel – a program of projects that focus on healthcare and education among other community issues.

“Thank you for renewing our hope,” Freeman told Moore. “Soror Moore, thank you for reminding people that we need to develop leaders.”

Leaders in a world of racism, sexism, ageism and other “isms” is what Zeta Phi Beta’s “pearls” were, said Moore, citing the state of the country in the days when five women decided to establish this new organization.

Klan rallies, the Harlem Renaissance, women’s voting rights and the Great Depression was the environment in which Arizona Cleaver, Pearl Neal, Fannie Pettie, Viola Tyler and Myrtle Tyler – coeds on the campus of Howard University in Washington, D.C. – founded Zeta Phi Beta in 1920. Despite the challenges they faced as black women in a segregated world, Moore said, the founders persisted with a spirit of determination.

“Tenacity,” Moore said. “Me for you and you for me. That’s been our legacy. That is why (the sorority) has stayed together ... that has been the way to our success for 84 years.”

Over the years, Zeta Phi Beta has made a name for itself by establishing a number of signature programs. The Stork’s Nest, established in 1972, is the sorority’s partnership with the March of Dimes to encourage women to seek prenatal care within the first trimester of pregnancy. Nationwide, the organization sponsors more than 150 Stork’s Nests. Zeta Phi Beta is also involved with the Human Genome Project and the National Educational Foundation.

“All programs aside,” Moore said, “it is our members, it is our people who make the sorority what it is ... just like Livingstone College will be known by its graduates.”

The list of Zeta members includes authors, actors, community leaders and national icons, educators, politicians and entertainers. Moore mentioned such famous sisters as the late singer Sara Vaughn and U.S. Rep. Julia Carson (D-IN), comedienne Sheryl Underwood and Dr. Lucy Perez, a past president of the National Medical Association.

“Zeta women have kept on stepping ... with dignity, style and strength. We are black women who are the cornerstone of society even though our heroism may go unnoticed,” Moore said. “Black women are phenomenal women. It is hard to imagine the progress of our sorority without the progress of black women in America.”

Moore encouraged the sorority's young members to uphold the common qualities of "pioneering phenomenal women," women like the five pearls.

Three qualities of pioneering women Moore said are a passion for excellence, a passion for education and a passion for life.

"I say to young women that in order to have a passion for excellence, you have to want it. You've got to want it 'til it hurts," Moore said. "You have to have a drive to surpass everybody else's best." She told the women, young and mature, to hold onto hope and to take care of themselves physically, mentally and spiritually.

At the end of Moore's talk, Freeman presented her with tokens of appreciation that included a set of Pierre Cardin pens. Moore said she would use her new pens to sign the sorority's first agreement with the American Red Cross.

"This is a wonderful school," Moore told Freeman. "So as folks say today, 'You go girl!'"

Before the program closed, a member of the Alpha Alpha Zeta chapter of the sorority announced that it is negotiating a Zeta scholarship at Livingstone College and one soror presented a \$1,500 check to Freeman to start the Dr. Algeania Freeman scholarship.

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