

**Rep. Tom Tangretti**  
**Remarks honoring Dr. Rod Booker**  
**Saturday, May 22, 2004**

---

**Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."**

**If indeed that is true, then I'm afraid that Doctor Rod Booker could be considered by some as an arsonist, because he has lit more candles – indeed – set more bonfires over the course of his professional career and community involvement than almost anyone else I know.**

**As I looked at the list of his accomplishments, awards, activities and offices, I started to feel pretty inadequate myself.**

**I had no idea that I was such a slacker.**

**You know, I could have sworn the other day that when I was watching one of those promotional ads for the U.S. Army – you know, the ones that say "We do more by 9 a.m. than most people do all day" – that I saw a tiny asterisk in the bottom**

**right-hand corner of the screen next the words  
“Except for Dr. Rod Booker.”**

**I’ve been a member of the state House of  
Representatives for 15 years, and an active  
member of the community for many more.**

**I sincerely have to say that during all that time, I  
have never run into a person more ubiquitous  
than Dr. Booker.**

**When you volunteer or participate in community  
activities in this area, you cannot help but get to  
know Dr. Booker, because frankly, he is  
everywhere.**

**Just about anytime something important  
happens in this area, Dr. Booker is involved,  
either as a coordinator, a participant or in some  
cases, simply there to give his blessing.**

**Receiving this honor from the NAACP must be  
very rewarding for him; I know that it is certainly  
deserved.**

**Of course, it’s just another in a long list of  
awards, recognitions and citations Dr. Booker**

**has received for his work with students and in the community.**

**We all know, however that that list covers just the tip of the iceberg.**

**I suspect that the most satisfying rewards Dr. Booker gets are the ones he sees on the faces of the people he's involved with, the people he's helped, the people whose lives he has touched.**

**And they are legion.**

**We know that another 275 will be added to that list come January, when Dr. Booker takes his Hempfield band for a triumphal march in the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena California.**

**What a great honor that will be for the students, Dr. Booker and everyone involved with the music program at Hempfield.**

**Each of those students has this great opportunity because of Dr. Booker – because of the days they didn't feel like practicing when he challenged them to be better and to dig deeper;**

**because of the days when they did not perform well at a game or a competition, and he told them that's OK, I know you are better, and will be better next time.**

**Just like many other people he has met and interacted with, I'm sure Dr. Booker has instilled in each of these young people a self-dedication, self-respect and pride that will carry them far long after they are gone from his care and his tutelage.**

**When they experience the kind of moment that few people get to experience next January, they will have Dr. Booker to thank; though I'm sure that during that same moment, he will be secretly thanking them for giving him the opportunity to work with them.**

**It makes me marvel – I mean, how many of us would be thankful to work with 275 teen-agers; all at the same time?**

**Most of us are driven nuts by having just a couple at home.**

**When we are discussing education issues in the General Assembly, I often think about the incredible job that our teachers do – 30 or so kids in a classroom at one time is tough enough, but 275?**

**I'm going to have to ask Dr. Booker sometime what that experience is really like, but I suspect it's like the one Mark Twain described when he said: "A man who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can learn no other way."**

**And I suspect perhaps that that is why Dr. Booker does what he does – both with his students and all his other activities – he is determined to learn the things about himself and about others that you can't really learn any other way.**

**I guess it's the time during my speech to admit that I was a bit nervous when I was first asked to give these remarks.**

**I mean, besides being an educator, Dr. Booker himself is a motivational speaker – something I can't really claim to be.**

I think I'm pretty darn good when I'm presenting checks to local groups, and I have a half decent stump speech during my campaigns, but this is different.

This is a testimonial about a man I truly respect; a man whose spirit I want to truly capture and honor.

My worst fear is that I'm going to sound like a Volkswagen Beetle trying to describe a Mack <sup>Mercedes</sup> truck, and that as a teacher, Dr. Booker is going to present me with a grade for this speech, and it's not going to be a very good one.

Another thing that made <sup>these</sup> ~~this~~ remarks difficult to prepare, and that's making this speech a bit difficult to deliver, is the fact that Dr. Booker is a man of so many facets.

Let's face it, if we had Joe Paterno sitting here being honored, we could talk football, football, football.

I can't get away with that talking about Dr. Booker.

**He's a lot more dynamic; his endeavors a lot more comprehensive, and quite frankly, his won/loss percentage is a lot better than JoePa's over the past few years.**

**So many of us feel very lucky if we can just manage to get our job done each and every day, and done well, that we are sometimes taken aback when we encounter a person like Dr. Booker who not only does his job better than most others, but who also finds the time (and the dedication to do so many other things so well.)**

**Dr. Booker's involvement in the community is truly breathtaking, and goes far beyond the music that comes out of a band instrument.**

**During his career, Dr. Booker has also made great music with the Hempfield Township Planning Commission, the Greensburg Fire Department, The Westmoreland Hospital Instructional Review Board, the Westmoreland County and the Hempfield/Greensburg Planning Commissions, the Westmoreland County Historical Society, the Greensburg Cultural Council, The National Association for the Study and Performance of African-American Music;**

**the Westmoreland Symphony Board, the  
National Black Music Caucus, Phi Delta Kappa,  
Phi Beta Mu...**

**I could go on and on ... and on.**

**But I don't want to portray Dr. Booker as simply a  
list of accomplishments or organizations.**

**Besides, even a complete list of every board  
he's served on, every commission he's  
participated in, every neighborhood he has  
helped, all his honors and professional  
accomplishments, would not do the man justice.**

**Such a list represents only the tip of the  
proverbial iceberg.**

**It's what you do not see on paper or plaques  
that truly defines Dr. Booker.**

**It's what you do see in the eyes of his students;  
on the faces of community members he has  
worked with and served with; and in the smiles  
and handshakes of almost every <sup>ONE</sup> he has ever  
met.**

**It is a deep respect for someone who is a truly mentor; someone who leads by example, and who teaches by doing – doing completely, doing right, and doing as much as he can for his fellow citizens.**

**Looking down Dr. Booker's resume, you don't see the one-on-one conversations with student after class; you don't see the role he has played in so many of their lives – and in our lives.**

**You don't see how he has shown many students and adults how to deal with problems – academic and otherwise – how to cope with the world and how to come out on top no matter the obstacles.**

**You don't see those things on a piece of paper – but you do see them in everyone Dr. Booker has touched.**

**It strikes me how appropriate it is that one of Dr. Booker's great loves is percussion.**

**As many of you know, Dr. Booker is an extremely talented percussionist.**

**What a great metaphor that is for his life and his career, as well.**

**As you know, the percussion section sets the beat for the rest of the band – without them, most pieces of music, and most orchestras or bands trying to play that music – fall apart.**

**I believe Dr. Booker is setting the beat for our students, for our community and for all of us as citizens.**

**He's challenging all of us to join his march ... to not let the parade of life pass by ... to not simply sit on the curbside and watch.**

**Dr. Booker's message – through what he says, what he does and what he teaches – is this:  
“Get out into the streets yourselves and march.**

**“Enjoy the march of life...and encourage everyone you meet to enjoy it and participate in it to the fullest extent possible, as well.”**

**He knows – and we all know after having met him – that doing that is enriching for community, enriching for our nation and,**

**perhaps most importantly, enriching for our soul.**

**Congratulations on this honor, Dr. Booker – I am sure there will be many more.**

**And thank you, for all you have done for this community and the wonderful people who live here.**

**We all owe you a great debt, and are privileged to do so.**

**###**