2005 Russell H. Perry Dinner

J.C. Watts Serves as Keynote Speaker at Event Honoring Pete Schenkel

(From left to right) Mike Arnold, dinner chair; J.C. Watts, keynote speaker; Pete Schenkel, award recipient; and J.L. Sonny Williams, honorary dinner chair
Dallas Baptist University proudly named Mr. Pete Schenkel as recipient of the 2005 Russell H. Perry Free Enterprise Award during the annual award dinner held on November 21 at the Wyndham Anatole Hotel. Former U.S. Congressman J.C. Watts served as the keynote speaker for the evening, and Mike Arnold, DBU alumnus and president of Arnold Stone, Inc., was the chair of the dinner, which saw over 1,200 in attendance. Fellow DBU alumnus and president/CEO of Momentum Advertising & Communications, J.L. Sonny Williams served as the honorary chair of the dinner.

The annual gala event marked its eighteenth anniversary this year as it continues to honor Dallas leaders whose lives are testimonies of achievement in free enterprise and service to the community. The event is named in memory of Dallas leader and philanthropist Russell H. Perry, whose life of service to Dallas impacted many lives. Mrs. Russell H. (Phoebe) Perry continues to be a friend of the city of Dallas and especially DBU. She and Mr. Perry began their support of the school in the 1960s.

Over the past eighteen years, the dinner has honored many North Texas leaders, and in doing so, has raised $2 million in scholarship funds for DBU students.

During his address, Mr. Watts stressed to the audience the exceptional character of America and the duty of all to ensure that it remains exceptional for the next generation. “We are an exceptional nation, not a normal nation, but an exceptional nation,” stated Mr. Watts. He went on to list various leaders who through
the years ensured that future Americans would inherit an even better America. These included Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Ronald Reagan. Each in their own way challenged America to dream large and fulfill its destiny of exceptionalism.

“I ask myself what kind of nation do I want my kids and my grandkids to inherit,” explained Mr. Watts. “I do not want them to inherit a normal nation. I want them to inherit America.”

To this end, Mr. Watts challenged those present to strive to make America better by holding to four core principles—faith, family, freedom, and free enterprise. A perfect model of these principles, according to Mr. Watts, could be found in this year’s Perry Award recipient, Pete Schenkel.

Pete Schenkel is a devoted Christian and family man with a decades-long history of civic involvement in the Dallas area. In the world of business, Mr. Schenkel has risen to the pinnacle of his industry. As president of Dean Foods’ Dairy Group, Mr. Schenkel oversees operations of the largest dairy processing entity in America with processing facilities in 47 states.

Mr. Schenkel’s values and work ethic were formed at an early age. As the son of a dairy farmer in South Dallas County, a very young Pete Schenkel worked long hours helping tend to the family cows and hauling milk. Valuable lessons learned from his parents, the late Rudy and Mary Schenkel, included adhering to the highest ethical standards and being loyal to and respectful of friends and customers.

Mr. Schenkel climbed the ladder to success one rung at a time, starting from the bottom. After graduating from Forest Avenue High School in 1954, Mr. Schenkel was hired by Schepps Dairy as an entry-level helper. A year later, he was given a milk delivery route.

Subsequent promotions—route supervisor, salesman, sales manager—helped set the stage for phenomenal corporate growth that began in the 1980s. In 1986, Mr. Schenkel led a group of investors in the purchase of Schepps Dairy. The success with Schepps helped serve as the foundation for many more acquisitions, sales and mergers culminating in 2002 with the purchase of Dean Foods, the largest dairy processing firm in the country. Today, the Dean Dairy Group, managed by Mr. Schenkel, has annual sales of $10 billion. Among the properties owned by Dean today is the same Schepps Dairy where a young Pete Schenkel began his career more than 50 years ago loading milk trucks.

Mr. Schenkel gives freely of his time and talents to benefit many organizations. He is chairman of...
the board of the Methodist Health Care Foundation, has served as chair of the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport Board of Directors, and was chairman of the State Fair of Texas board.

The men and women of law enforcement hold a special place in the heart of Mr. Schenkel. He has provided assistance to officers through the years in a number of meaningful ways. He serves on the board of the Dallas Blue Foundation, a non-profit organization providing financial assistance to the families of police officers wounded or killed in the line of duty. He also oversees a 30-year-old corporate program where Schepps and other dairies around the country assist law enforcement investigations by posting $10,000 rewards.

Mr. Schenkel frequently works with appointed and elected officials. His advice and counsel—as well as his endorsements—have been sought out by a long succession of mayors and council members. He is often called upon to be the conduit between governments and the business community in advisory and fund-raising for public projects.

“The Russell H. Perry Free Enterprise Award is a tribute to what can be accomplished when a team of people work together and what can be accomplished when that work is performed within the framework of Christian values,” stated Mr. Schenkel in accepting the award.

A modest man, Mr. Schenkel shies away from the spotlight and is quick to credit others for his success. Chief among those he praises is his lovely wife, Pat. Mr. and Mrs. Schenkel worship regularly at the Highland Oaks Church of Christ. They have three children and seven grandchildren.
Members of the DBU chorale perform a special musical medley honoring the United States entitled “Our Flag Was Still There.”

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Amy Jones, DBU alumna and trustee, entertains the crowd along with her friend, Rusty.

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DBU alumna Jaime Parrish
Feaster, leads in the singing of the National Anthem.