2008 Russell H. Perry Dinner Honors Drayton McLane, Jr.

(From left to right) Dr. Kenneth Cooper, Honorary Chair of the Russell Perry Dinner Committee; Drayton McLane, Jr., 2008 Award Honoree; U. S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, Keynote Speaker; and J.L. Sonny Williams, Chair of the Dinner Committee.
Dallas Baptist University proudly named Drayton McLane as recipient of the 2008 Russell H. Perry Free Enterprise Award during the annual award dinner held on November 24 at the Hilton Anatole Hotel.

United States Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison served as the keynote speaker for the evening. Dr. Kenneth H. Cooper, founder and CEO of the Cooper Aerobics Center, and his wife, Millie, filling in for Julie Turner, were the honorary chairs of the dinner, which saw over 1,200 in attendance. J.L. Sonny Williams, a DBU alumnus and trustee and past president and COO of Minyard Food Stores, Inc., was this year’s dinner chair and master of ceremonies.

The annual gala event marked its 21st anniversary as it continues to honor Texas 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 institution in the 1960s. Over the past 20 years, the dinner has honored many North Texas leaders, and in doing so, has raised over $2.6 million in scholarship funds for over 1,100 DBU students. This year’s selection of Drayton McLane marks the first time the award has gone to an individual beyond the Dallas Metroplex.

Making a welcome return to the dinner was Dr. Gary Cook, president of DBU. On October 12, 2007, he was diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia and hospitalized, undergoing treatment and observation for a total of 32 days and consequently forced to miss the 2007 dinner, the first dinner he had missed in 20 years. “The Lord is good to be with you when you go through trials, and He was always there with me,” spoke a grateful Dr. Cook. The University has experienced tremendous continual growth under his leadership, as was justly honored in a presentation by Sonny Williams highlighting the rare accomplishments achieved during his tenure. Dr. Cook graciously thanked those who have contributed financially to support DBU’s mission to equip students who change the world as servant leaders in their respective callings. He reminded the audience, “We have a lot of young people on campus who love the Lord with all their heart and want to serve Him in various vocations.”

The spotlight then shifted to keynote speaker Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, who delivered a speech highlighting Drayton McLane’s success in the business realm, which she attributed to his hard work and innovation. Her praise of these traits, which allowed him to rise from humble beginnings to become one of the most impressive entrepreneurs in the country, turned to a larger celebration of the establishment of free enterprise in America and its imperative role as a safeguard to personal freedom and opportunity.

A video presentation followed, in which several of Drayton McLane’s closest friends and associates continued the celebration of a remarkable man and his legacy. Over and over again they praised him as a man of integrity dedicated to his duties as a businessman, family man, and leader in the...
Church and overall community.

“Drayton McLane is a mentor, a friend, a good man,” testified Pam Gardner, President of Business Operations for McLane’s beloved Houston Astros. “He has a passion for everything he does, not just business and politics, but really for life. He is the energy and force behind any project that he touches.”

At the conclusion of the video, Dr. Kenneth Cooper, honorary chair of the dinner, and his wife, Millic, came to the podium and formally presented the award to Drayton McLane—a man who has spent his whole life learning and growing in the business community, building several incredibly successful organizations along the way.

Raised by a father who managed a wholesale grocery distribution center, Drayton was introduced to business at a young age. He began working for his father at age nine, soaking up knowledge of various aspects of the family company. After graduating high school in 1954, he ventured off to Baylor to earn his undergraduate education and then to Michigan State University to receive a Master of Business Administration degree in marketing. With five years of education and two degrees to his credit, he returned to work for his father. The following two and a half decades saw him serve as general manager of operations, president and CEO, and chairman of McLane Company. Having effectively created one of the largest distribution systems in the country, he proceeded to sell his business to Wal-Mart, becoming one of Wal-
Mart's largest stockholders.

The next major business opportunity that presented itself to McLane, the ownership of the Houston Astros, was a special challenge. McLane had little prior knowledge of baseball and had only attended a handful of professional games. Yet he eagerly took the reins in 1993 and, armed with his savvy business know how and Christian compassion, he has since transformed the Astros into a franchise which excels on the field and off the field, making a positive difference in the greater Houston community. In 2005, the Astros became the first Texas team to reach the World Series.

In addition to his leadership of the Astros, he devotes his time to the McLane Group, the family holding company for several U. S. and international corporations. Drayton and his wife, Elizabeth, reside in Temple and are active members of First Baptist Church in Temple. There, Mr. McLane serves as a deacon, having been a past chairman of the deacons, and has been a faithful Sunday School teacher for over 35 years. Additionally, he is very active in many local and national organizations, including the United Way and the Executive Committee of Boy Scouts of America and has served as Chairman of the Board for Scott & White Hospital, past Chairman and Board Member of Regents for Baylor University, and Board Member of the Cooper Institute. In addition, he owns Lone Star Plastics, Inc., in Garland, and Classic Foods in Fort Worth. The McLanes have two sons, Drayton III and Denton, and four grandchildren.
A quartet of DBU students joined together with the DBU Grand Chorus to serenade Russell H. Perry Award Honoree Drayton McLane with a stirring rendition of “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” as he came to the stage to accept the award. In 1993, Drayton McLane became the owner of the Major League Baseball team, the Houston Astros.

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