Albert Schweitzer Fellowship—

Houston Galveston

2014 Celebration of Service

On April 17, 2014 ASFHG Celebrated the service of the 2013/14 Fellows by honoring them at an event at The Veranda *17 in the Sam Houston Hotel. We also honored Dr. Bernard Harris Jr., MD with The Humanitarian Award. This event marked the fifth annual celebration of service and second annual Humanitarian award for the Houston-Galveston Program.

The event was emceed by Deborah Duncan, from Great Day Houston on KHOU-TV. She did a wonderful job of keeping the mood fun and energetic. Especially when she affectionately asked Dr. Harris if “we were alone”. The whole room started laughing and Dr. Harris confirmed that there are indeed aliens out there. He could not confirm, however if there were any in the room.

The event started with Board Chair, Dr. David Buck welcoming everyone and thanking them and their organizations for supporting ASFHG in all the ways they give throughout the year. I want to echo those thankful sentiments here as well. Thank you to all of our financial supporters, community partners, Academic partners and corporate sponsors. Because of your support we are able to provide services and education to Harris and Galveston counties’ underserved populations and ensure that those services will continue by developing the skills, network, experiences, and confidence of emerging leaders in healthcare.

After a warm applause of welcome, Deborah invited 13/14 Fellow Sarah Michael to lead the room in an invocation.

After lunch was served and people had a chance to introduce themselves at the tables, Deborah came back on stage again. She graciously thanked everyone for being there again and brought Dr. Buck up. Dr. Buck acknowledged the ASFHG Board of Directors, who have worked very hard this year to create an independent 501c3 in order for ASFHG to expand our reach and be able to serve more. He also acknowledged the 2014 Humanitarian Award event volunteer host committee: Linda May, Jennifer Murphy, Carlie Brown, Mark Kline, Robert Sanborn and Jennifer Cook. Dr. Buck then gave a wonderful speech about the importance of not just providing service, but creating leaders in service and the nature of how ASFHG came to Houston. He then spoke of the Humanitarian Award and the significance of it, before offering the award to Dr. Bernard Harris Jr., recipient of the 2014 Humanitarian Award.

As we share in thankfulness our year’s experience—all the people we’ve connected with and the knowledge that we gained—and reflect on all that didn’t go quite as planned, leaving us with so many questions and so much more to do, I leave you with a few words from Rainer Maria Rilke in "Letters to a Young Poet."

"I beg you....to have patience with everything unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."

It was a lovely quote and kicked the event off very well.

Dr. Harris gave a wonderful and
“A constructive, useful life, good works, and good relationships are as valid as writing poetry or inventing a machine. Anything that one does well and obtains satisfaction from is a good reason for living. To be a decent human being that people like and feel better for knowing is enough.”

Robert Gould

very motivating speech about how important service and collaborations are to the future generations of the world. He talked about his life growing up, being raised by a single parent in a time where racial discrimination was everywhere. He told anecdotal stories about growing up on an Indian reservation and aspiring to be all that he has become. He also spoke about being an astronaut and space travel in general. He tried to paint a picture for the audience just how amazing the experience is. Though I doubt any of us can grasp the magnitude of many of the topics he spoke on or the experiences he has had, we all could feel the passion in his speech and could tell that it came from the heart.

Dr. Bernard Harris Jr. is still working hard to give back to the community and help vulnerable populations through his efforts with The Harris Foundation and efforts with other organizations such as the Council for the National Institute Health/National Institute for Deafness. Dr. Harris’s goals in life have been achieved through self-empowerment and self-determination. He believes that education and effort will allow anyone to meet any challenge in life, inspiring others to reach for the stars. It was a truly motivational speech and showed how Dr. Harris is following in the footsteps of Albert Schweitzer.

After Dr. Harris’s speech and acceptance of the 2014 Humanitarian Award the Celebration of Service for the 2013/14 Fellows began. David Kahne, JD, ASFHG Treasurer called each by name to come up for a certificate of completion from and to pose for a photo with Dr. Buck and Jennifer Cook, ASFHG Director. Francisco Nieves closed the program with a wonderful speech about what his project has meant to him and closure. In the last meeting Dr. Buck had mentioned that there didn’t seem to be closure among the Fellows. Francisco reflected back and said that it was because their projects and desire to provide service were not coming to a close as their careers are starting. He ended with a thank you to all the mentors and supporters they had had in the past year as well as a special thanks to the Director, Jennifer Cook. His speech left the audience with the knowledge and confidence that these twelve students, were going to enter into and maintain a life of service and be leaders to their peers throughout their careers to bring others into a life of service with them.

Almost all of the 2013/14 Fellows were present at the Luncheon. Three could not be at the event because they were abroad doing service work. An La and Sandra Jacob were in Vietnam and Matthew Mullane was in India. We are proud that our Fellows are active in service all over the world. We were also very lucky to have so many of the academic and site mentors present. Eight of the 13/14 projects were represented by at least one mentor. There were many mentors present from the incoming 14/15 class as well. It was a wonderful opportunity for them to learn more about the program and the types of things their mentees will be doing and can possibly face as boulders in the upcoming year. Almost all of the 14/15 Fellows were also present as well as many FFL from past years. It was exciting to see so many generations of Fellows, mentors, and friends of ASFHG in one room together.

While it is hard to say goodbye, we all feel confident that the 13/14 Fellows will continue to do great work wherever they end up. And we know that they will continue to be involved in the program as mentors, presenters, future Board Members and friends of ASFHG as well as a resource for the present and future ASFHG Fellows. Follow this link to see all of the photos courtesy of Sam Creative.

On behalf of the ASFHG Staff and Board of Directors I want to thank again everyone that was part of the Annual Humanitarian Award and Celebration of Service Event. We appreciate your support and service in all the ways you give to ASFHG and the community every day. The 2015 Luncheon will be held on April 16, 2015. Mark your Calendar!!

Jennifer Cook, ASFHG Staff
Feature Fellow—Jag Maturi

The improved relationships and communication between healthcare professionals not only provides better patient care, but also yields the opportunity to understand one’s position within the growing health system. The Albert Schweitzer Fellowship delivered well beyond my expectations of the potential behind interdisciplinary education. I had the pleasure of learning the complexities of medicine, dentistry, social work, and public health while exploring the nuances of critical problems that surround us together - with the fellows and guest educators.

Around one year ago from the day you’re reading this, my perspective could clearly be characterized by the terms naïve and sophomore. The fellowship’s structure and process have molded that very tender mind into the explorative problem solver one I have earned today. Amongst many examples I share the instance in which I came to a concrete wall, better known as a large round boulder by Dr. Schweitzer. The site I had intended to do my original project at suddenly insisted on avoiding the liability behind said project. Jennifer and Dr. Masilamani (my amazing mentors) gave tools, advice, and counsel on alternatives that may equally express my expertise to an underserved community. Thus I had begun my endless journey of learning how to solve problems in the healthcare world and beyond. To name a few: 1) don’t hesitate to ask for help, worst case we hear “no” 2) stick to a set of goals and ask yourself daily “what have you done towards them?” 3) Teamwork makes everything fun.

Today I keep a small boulder on my desk, like the smooth oval shaped grey ones we see in the parking lot outside grocery stores, to always keep in mind that though problems may come up in our lives, we can always pick them up, pause, think them through, and execute one of the ideal solutions.

Alongside the fellows of 2013-14’, it was an honor to join the nationwide Schweitzer family and we look forward to all adventures as Fellows for Life!

Jag Maturi—University of Houston School of Pharmacy, ASFHG 13/14 Fellow

Where does all that food go?

In a recent article on reason.com, Bans on Sharing Food with Homeless Persist, Baylen Linnekin brings to light an interesting topic that has recently been in the Houston media and the topic of a conversation I had not long ago with some restaurant executives. I recently had a meeting with some execs from a Houston food chain that owns over 100 restaurants in the greater Houston area about implementing a recycling program. After getting shot down due to cost, culture, and the will to make change I moved the conversation to waste in general. What happens to all of the food that is left at the end of the night? I learned that one manager got caught taking left over food to a local shelter and got demoted.

They felt he was lucky that no charges were pressed and that he was still employed by the company. I learned that Houston, as well as most other cities, has strict policies prohibiting food distribution. Even employees are not allowed to take the extra food home to their families at the end of the night, even though many of them are food insecure themselves and living under the poverty line. The policies in place are meant to protect people from getting sick and protect the restaurants or other providers from liability suits, but it seems like such a waste. Houston Food Bank, who feeds over 137,000 people per week and almost solely relies on food donations and volunteers will not take food from local restaurants unless it is packaged dry goods. How many more people could be served if they could?

In another article from 2012 the author, Chris Moran gives some opinions and some interesting information about why some of the ordinances in Houston came about and have been so difficult to lift even with so many organizations, groups and religious leaders advocating against them. One person interviewed said that “these bans only make it more difficult to help and harder to provide the basic services to Houston’s neediest”. It is interesting to see the conflicts that arise between policy and service and that it can be difficult to draw a line between keeping people safe and providing basic needs and services.

There are many organizations that distribute food and other goods to Houston’s homeless and food insecure on a daily basis. A list of Houston food pantries can be found here.

-Jennifer Cook, ASFHG Staff
The mission of ASF is improving the health of vulnerable people now and for the future by developing a corps of Leaders in Service—professionals skilled in creating positive change with and in our communities, our health and human service systems, and our world.

ASFHG has four overall goals:

- Develop Leaders in Service who are educated, experienced, and committed to addressing unmet health needs;
- Improve community health by providing direct service to individuals and strengthening the capacity of community-based organizations;
- Expand educational opportunities in partnering schools while raising awareness of the needs of underserved communities; and
- Maintain a growing and vibrant community of Schweitzer Fellowship alumni (Fellows for Life) committed to lives of service.

You can contact Jennifer Cook, Director for more information at Jennifer.cook@schweitzerfellowship.org

To give to ASFHG please follow this link:  
https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/1443402

Make sure you choose the Houston-Galveston tab or mail a check to the address below.

Albert Schweitzer Fellowship—Houston Galveston  
3701 Kirby Dr.  
Suite 600  
Houston, TX 77098

Save the Dates:

- Meet the FFLs—May 18, 2014  
3701 Kirby dr. 6th floor

Look for other events and volunteer opportunities on Facebook and email announcements

2014/15 Albert Schweitzer Fellowship-Houston Galveston Fellows