Thank you, Sharon, and welcome to what promises to be a wonderful evening.

I am honored to be a part of tonight’s event. UMUC has been a lead sponsor and host for the past four years... because it underscores our ongoing mission to educate knowledge leaders for the future. Individuals who will make an extraordinary impact on our state, our country, and our world as successful business owners; creative problem-solvers; and social change agents...And who truly reflect the remarkable talents and abilities of the men and women we are here to celebrate as this year’s Minority Business Enterprise Award winners.

We all know – and can’t help but admire -- those ingenious individuals among us, who will risk it all to create something new in this world; while at the same time doing whatever it takes to make it successful. Individuals who paddle ahead of the current...waves breaking over the boat...to seize an opportunity at the mouth of the river. And who are intuitive enough to follow their gut; yet flexible enough to know when it’s time to change course.

Known as entrepreneurs...these professionals come from all walks of life and many different backgrounds; while spanning the age continuum. And they are literally driving the American economy – as their numbers continue to climb among women and minorities.

In your pursuit of the American dream, you have chosen the road less traveled, -- paved with hard work, perseverance, and self-sacrifice. Yet by channeling your considerable passion and inestimable skills, you have succeeded in realizing your unique visions along the way...to build profitable businesses...establish effective organizations...and pioneer groundbreaking discoveries. And your personal stories and outstanding achievements inspire us all!
Events such as this one serve to further UMUC’s solid commitment to support Maryland’s longstanding tradition of enterprise and innovation. As a worldwide, world-class institution and the state’s only public university created especially for working adults…UMUC offers a wealth of lifelong learning opportunities, designed to foster the entrepreneurial mindset, while also encouraging the entrepreneurial spirit.

Of course, with academic opportunities of this scope, UMUC has created an extraordinary network of regional, national, and international partners, with individuals like Special Secretary Luwanda Jenkins of the Governor’s Office of Minority Affairs. Working together, our organizations will continue to harness the power of diversity with the promise of education…to fuel economic and social prosperity for all of Maryland’s citizens.

And let me also thank one of UMUC’s most enterprising graduates and my very good friend…Sharon Pinder…who has been a driving force behind tonight’s event. Sharon is truly a trailblazer when it comes to leveling the playing field for women and minority-owned businesses…and as a successful entrepreneur in her own right and distinguished member of UMUC’s Board of Visitors and our faculty, she continues to motivate us all with her dedication to the cause.

And finally, I ask that you join me now in a warm round of applause for our remarkable honorees.

On behalf of everyone here, I commend your unfaltering determination; salute your exemplary accomplishments; and wish you every success in your future endeavors! Thank you very much.

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