

Remarks by First Lady Laura Bush at the Presentation of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities 2007 Coming Up Taller Awards

The East Room
Washington DC
9:44 A.M. EST
28 January 2008



MRS. BUSH: Welcome, bienvenidos, y huan ying to the White House. I want to acknowledge Adair Margo, who is the Chairman of the President's Committee on Arts and Humanities. And it's the President's Committee that presents these Coming Up Taller awards that we're all here for today.

Henry Moran, who is the Executive Director of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities; members of the President's Committee -- I see some of them around in some different spots around here -- thank you for everything you do. Bruce Cole, who is the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities; Dana Gioia, the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts; Anne Radice, who is the Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services; these -- Henry Moran, Bruce Cole, Dana Gioia and Anne Radice were just saying, when we had our photo together, that they are the de facto Minister of Culture -- Ministers of Culture in the United States. (Laughter and applause.)

I want to welcome Senator Ted Stevens. Thank you so much for coming. I think we know, because he's here, that an Alaska group is about to win one of the Coming Up Taller awards. Thank you very much. Thank you, Lily. (Applause.)

Also, Ambassador Arturo Sarukhan, the Ambassador of Mexico, to the United States, and Veronica, his wife. Where are they? There they are, right there. (Applause.) They're here because the Coming Up Taller awards have worked for the last few years with the government of Mexico to also present some Mexican art groups the Coming Up Taller award, and so welcome.

And, this is the new part of Coming Up Taller this year, and that is a partnership with the People's Republic of China and their youth groups. And so I want to welcome the Ambassador, Ambassador Zhou Wenzhong, Ambassador from People's Republic of China to the United States, and our very special guest, Minister Sun, the Minister of Culture from the People's Republic of China. Thank you, Minister. (Applause.)



Mrs. Laura Bush and People's Republic of China Minister of Culture Sun Jiazheng (far left) congratulates the Children's Palace of Shanghai with a Coming Up Taller award.

Thank you all for coming, and thanks to each and every person in this room for your work to promote the arts and humanities -- especially through these Coming Up Taller awards.

For ten years, the Coming Up Taller awards have honored youth organizations that make extraordinary contributions to arts and culture in their communities. The 2007 winners are outstanding. Choirs and theater groups entertain. Museum and heritage programs educate. Art and dance studios delight and inspire. And every single Coming Up Taller program helps young people use their energy and creativity to succeed.

Helping young people build the knowledge and the self-confidence they need to lead successful lives is at the heart of President Bush's Helping America's Youth Initiative. President Bush announced Helping America's Youth in his 2005 State of the Union address, and he asked me to lead it. So over the last three years, I've been to schools and to after-school programs. I've visited fatherhood initiatives. I've met with mentors and Big Brothers and Big Sisters. I've visited gang-intervention programs, where I've met young people who are leaving gangs and finding jobs.

Many of the programs I've visited are Coming Up Taller award programs. In Philadelphia or Fort Worth, what all of these programs have in common are dedicated adults, eager to help young people make the most of their talents and their lives.

Dedicated adults are hard at work in Wilmington, North Carolina. There, the DREAMS Center helps children feel like they belong -- on stage, or in the theater, or in art studios, or in classes that teach African dance, drumming or mask-making.

Baltimoreans are seeing their city through a different lens -- thanks to the Youthlight Photography Project. Middle-schoolers learn to shoot with a 35-millimeter camera, and their poignant photos capture the complexities of their neighborhoods and family life. Local galleries show these pictures, so Youthlight photographers take pride in their work -- and in themselves.

In Tucson, visitors to La Pilita Museum are welcomed by young tour guides: elementary-schoolers who participate in the La Pilita Youth Docent Program. Through the program, children learn about their community's history and culture, and they find interesting ways to express themselves -- "as long as they get the facts right." (Laughter.)

In Yonkers, participants in the Hudson River Museum's Junior Docents program gain valuable first job experience -- and have so much fun that they stay in the program for an average of five years. So



For five years, Mrs. Laura Bush has presented a Coming Up Taller award to Mexican organizations. This year she was joined in presenting the award by Alvaro Hegewisch (left) and special guest the Mexican Ambassador to the U.S. Arturo Sarukhan (not pictured).

far, all of the Junior Docents who've stayed in through senior year of high school have gone on to college.

A few miles away in Brooklyn, young New Yorkers turn heart-breaking life stories into award-winning films -- with help from professional documentary-filmmakers at The Lab.

In Pittsfield, Massachusetts, teens overcome substance abuse, family violence, and school failure on stage at the Playwright Mentoring Project.

In Culver City, California, children who once acted out now prefer simply to act -- in the Unusual Suspects Theater Company. Youth in the juvenile corrections and foster care systems work with top Hollywood actors, writers, and directors to develop their theater techniques. And they work together to resolve conflicts with fellow actors from rival gangs or neighborhoods.

The WINGS Performing Arts program in Gulfport, Mississippi, uses theater to teach children life skills, confidence, and teamwork. Members of the WINGS "core group" agree to keep up their grades, and participate in community service projects. WINGS productions have earned statewide recognition -- and 100 percent of graduating seniors have gone to college.

Not many after-school programs encourage kids to "clown around." But at the Sitka Fine Arts Camp, clowning is just one of 60 different classes offered to young people from rural Alaska. Children can study everything from Shakespeare to native beadwork to jazz and hip-hop. For many of these children, this camp is their very first introduction to the arts.

Children are introduced to the power of words through the Philadelphia Reads SWARM program. This summer initiative uses art, music, and science to improve early-childhood literacy. And the Reading is Fundamental program sends each child home with two books to start their own library.

Someday, our libraries may contain books of poetry written by the children in the Words@Play program. Through Words@Play, young people in Chicago's underserved neighborhoods study works written by great poets, and find their own voices in the expressive forms of verse.

The voices of the award-winning Richmond's Boys Choir have delighted audiences across Virginia. They've also delighted audiences from across the Pond. This year, the choir performed for Queen Elizabeth at the opening ceremonies of Jamestown's 400th anniversary. In addition to learning protocol for meeting the Queen, and proper table manners for a formal banquet, choir members develop teamwork, patience, and outstanding musicianship.

The hills are alive with the sound of music -- in the Yucatan Peninsula, that is. The four youth choirs established by the Cultural Center San Francisco Tzcalha are renowned for their performances in Spanish, Mayan, Latin, Italian, and French. Whether they're singing in local schools and churches, or at the state capital in Merida, choir members gain a deep respect for their own culture.

In a few minutes, we'll enjoy the vibrant dance culture of Latin America -- thanks to Ritmo en Acción. Ritmo en Acción helps young people step out of dangerous Boston neighborhoods by mastering the intricate steps of merengue, salsa, and other Latin dances. Young performers also live up to the program's high standards off the dance floor: Since Ritmo en Acción began in 2001, all participating seniors have gone on to college.

At Imagination Celebration Fort Worth, young people stretch their expectations through the Debbie Allen Dance Institute. Young dancers learn discipline and perseverance as they study classical ballet, jazz, tap, flamenco, hip-hop, and African dance. And they learn from impressive mentors, including the summer workshop's namesake: dancer and choreographer Debbie Allen.

Positive relationships with adults are the hallmark of Imagination Celebration Fort Worth's other award-winning initiative, the Young Artists Apprenticeship program. With guidance from master artists, young apprentices improve their skills in painting, sculpture, drawing, and design.

For the first time ever, a Coming Up Taller awards program include a program from the People's Republic of China. At the China Welfare Institute Children's Palace in Shanghai, members of the Little Companion Art Troupe develop their talents in dance, music, drama, puppetry, and traditional Chinese calligraphy, arts, and crafts. Through international tours, troupe members present their country's culture on the global stage.

Coming Up Taller programs are helping children discover their cultural heritage in Kansas and Querétaro. With their feet and their fingertips, visually impaired teens trace the history of America's pioneers through Kansas City's Discovery Trails program.

In Mexico, young people are grabbing their guitars and learning the music and dance style of huapango. With help from local elders, children in the Programa de Formación are building ties across generations, and reviving the Huasteca region's musical traditions. Felicidades.

And congratulations to all of the recipients of the 2007 Coming Up Taller awards. Because of the great programs you represent, young people are discovering humanities and the arts. They're building the confidence to paint, dance, speak, and sing -- and in every one of their communities, to walk taller. Thank you all very, very much. (Applause.)

Now I'm delighted to introduce a friend of mine, and a friend to the arts and to young people across our country: the Chairman of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, Adair Margo. (Applause.)

END 10:45 A.M. EST
Photos by Steven Purcell