

JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT 2011 LAURIATE

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

THEO ETZEL, CONDITIONED AIR

Thank you to the committee for selecting me for this honor. I am privileged to be in such great company with the past Laureate recipients as well as my co-recipient George Beasley. I happen to like gospel songs. There's a song with the title: Give Them Their Roses While They Live, referring to the fact that often times we pass up the opportunity to tell someone how important they are to us, or that they did a good job, or give them a pat on the back, until it's too late. Junior Achievement has certainly lived up to the title and I want the Junior Achievement organization to know that I consider this a **big rose**, and one for which I will always be grateful.

I want to say a special thank you to a wonderful management team, my partners, and the staff at Conditioned Air for making my career truly enjoyable and fulfilling. I have many friends and peers in the room tonight. I want each one of you to know that you make me a better person because you are in my life. I would never be here without the dedication and help from my teammates, friends and mentors. And a very special thank you to my wife, Kim, of 31+ years for constant support, love, friendship and partnership in faith. The Lord blessed me when He led me to her almost 38 years ago. They say that behind every successful man is a great and strong woman. In my case I disagree. She has always been at my side or out in front and I thank her very much for that. And to my two children Chad and Kristen who were a real joy to have growing up in our home, I thank you for your love and support; and for your choices in spouses, adding to our family, our daughter-in-law, Kim and our son-in-law, John.

I nearly always stop at lemonade stands. They hold a special place in my heart because I became an entrepreneur at an early age by selling lemonade, iced tea and candy bars along a bike path in south Miami. I learned about pricing, cost of goods, and profit; profit I used to buy souvenirs on a family vacation in New England and a telephone for my room...the kind that made a loud bell-like ringing sound and had a wire that attached in the wall. I bagged groceries when I was 15 so I could buy my first car, a 10 year old, 4 door Buick that needed lots of Bondo. This is not to say that my parents didn't provide for me, far from it. I never lacked for anything I needed. But more than material things, I was provided opportunities for experiences and responsibilities that did not rust or fade with time but became block upon block to build and influence my future. In fact, I'm very blessed to have my mother and my father in my life still today and am very pleased that my mom could be here tonight. These life lessons continue to serve me well. Somehow my work experiences seemed to center around food. In high school I headed up the prom fund-raising efforts and often found myself hawking donuts and bagels to parents and even stop-and-go drivers along Biscayne Blvd. For the record, we held our prom at the Fontainebleau Hotel that year thanks to a number of increased waist lines.

The activities I just described, while small in scope, are the foundations of the free enterprise system. Junior Achievement focuses on the value to the American way of life based on this system. In recent weeks we have seen news coverage of protesters wishing to destroy the capitalism and free enterprise structure this country was, and needs to remain, founded upon. For the younger students in the room, since I still consider myself a student each day, do not lose faith in free enterprise. Do not seek to

destroy it, seek to improve it and perfect it as you become leaders in business, organizations, and government. Our economic system is the best in the world for the allocation of goods and services to its citizens. It sparks innovation, rewards risk takers, and drives people to improve processes and efficiencies continually. Why? Because, as Americans, we're allowed to vote with our dollars each day. If people stop voting for us because we become complacent in our business, we go away, we lose. But, if we do things right, and we do the right things for people, and we have perseverance through all the ups and downs, and always remember that our customers are our true employers, we win. Please don't buy into the belief that just because some people abuse the system, we need to throw the capitalist baby out with the free enterprise bath water. They need to remain the building blocks of this great country and with all our commitment and help, they will.

I believe that one of my roles at Conditioned Air is to be the chief cheerleader for our team. I think that's very important, especially given the last few years. Each week, and for nearly 17 years now, I write a Positive Note, distributed each Friday to all our employees, with an uplifting message in it. Tonight you've heard, and can plainly see, that I enjoy all types of food. Lemonade and donuts hold a special place in my memory when it comes to my sales, promotion and entrepreneurial spirit. I enjoy writing business articles and even an occasional poem. Well, on my office wall is a diploma. That's not so unusual. What might be considered unusual, and catches visitors a little off guard, is that it's my original kindergarten diploma; my Bachelor of Rhymes diploma. How am I going to tie all these together? I'm going to leave you tonight with a positive note, in the form of a rhyme, that has a food component in it, that I learned from a great man and family friend, Jim Miller. He often repeated this and I think it sums up those facets of my life that have been shared tonight: **“As you go through life, no matter your goal; keep your eye upon the donut, and not upon the hole.”** Oh, and won't you please support your local lemonade stand, a young entrepreneur may just mention it in a speech someday.

Thank you again for this very special honor and being here with your support.