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### Celebrating the 2016 Honorary Degree Recipients

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*Syracuse University*

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# SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on May 14, 2016

Location: Chancellor's House

Remarks: Chancellor's Remarks Celebrating the 2016 Honorary Degree Recipients

*The Chancellor was introduced by Elizabeth Liddy  
Interim Vice Chancellor and Provost.*

Thank you, Liz.

Good evening. Ruth and I are so pleased to welcome you to our home. I thank the staff that prepared everything so beautifully.

I also thank the selection committee that put such thought and wisdom into choosing these honorary degree recipients.

A thank you, too, to the sponsors of those we honor:

- For Kevin Bell and Tobias Wolff: Karin Ruhlandt, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.
- For Floyd Little: Diane Murphy, dean of the Falk College.
- And, for Donald Newhouse: Lorraine Branham, dean of the Newhouse School.

Our special guests are men of brilliance, commitment and vision.

They are multifaceted. They have attained international reputations for the quality of their character. It is made evident by their work, and by a generosity of spirit.

They have maintained unyielding standards of excellence in a digital world that has swiftly changed around them.

Each represents an extraordinary role model, a gold standard, for what we dream our students at Syracuse University might become.

They also provide a humbling reminder of our role, as educators: There are students on this campus, right now, who are moved and inspired to achieve similar results.

Consider Donald Newhouse, our commencement speaker. The son of S.I. Newhouse Sr., Donald is the president of Advance Publications. He is the leader of America's largest privately held chain of newspapers. His father had the vision and selflessness to help create our S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. To this day, Donald and his family are deeply involved as the school evolves and expands. Their philanthropy allowed us to build Newhouse 3. And today journalism students from around the world dream of someday being accepted at Newhouse. It is a beacon.

Donald has deep and lasting ties to the greater Syracuse community. He attended our university. We share in his grief over the passing last year of his wife Susan. She was a native of Syracuse and a great humanitarian.

Donald's family owns and operates the Syracuse Media Group, including Syracuse.com and The Post-Standard. Working with him has been one of the joys and revelations of my position. I look forward to the insight he will share tomorrow morning with our students, and their families and friends.

Kevin Bell, another of our honorary recipients, had a childhood most of us would see as magical: He grew up on the grounds of one of the world's most famous zoos. His father was director of ornithology at the Bronx Zoo. Imagine, as a child, what wonders awaited him every day, outside his front door. Kevin was a keeper at 17, a caretaker at 20. He earned his biology degree from Syracuse, then went on to a life of tremendous accomplishment.

His rich career would lead him to where he is now: President and chief executive officer of Chicago's Lincoln Park Zoological Society. He achieved that position through one unchanging standard: a lifetime of concern and compassion for animals.

He has traveled around the world: India. Panama. Africa. His work with puffins in Iceland was the subject of an award-winning PBS documentary, “Arctic Window.” He has been an international leader in zoology.

In 2005, he received the president’s award for helping to raise more than \$1 million for zoos and aquariums damaged by Hurricane Katrina. He does not forget his ties to Syracuse. This morning, he was the convocation speaker for our College of Arts and Sciences.

What an example for our students.

Tobias Wolff has climbed to the highest tier in the great tradition of writing and storytelling. He spent 17 years teaching at Syracuse University.

Not only did he mentor and inspire many students: He found time to do great, enduring literary work. He published “This Boy’s Life,” his tremendous memoir, while he was here. It was a work that captured the depth and breadth of the human experience: He reflected on great pain and loss. Yet Tobias made us understand how that experience can lead to truth and beauty.

In the greatest sense, what better way to define an education?

Syracuse has missed Tobias since he left, but he has gone on to such great things:

- The Ward W. and Priscilla B. Woods Professor in the Humanities at Stanford University.
- The PEN/Malamud Award.
- The Los Angeles Times Book Prize.

In 2015, at the White House, President Obama presented him with the National Medal for the Arts.

At Syracuse, we take deep pride in the great writers who flourished – and continue to flourish - on our campus. They have done tremendous work. They have lifted up our students. When we look at Tobias Wolff, we can say with pride: He represents an artist at the pinnacle.

Our final honorary degree recipient is one I chose to save as a crescendo – because a crescendo so fits his personality. You do not forget the first time you

shake Floyd Little's hand. Everything about him involves passion and positive motion. Most recently he served as special assistant to the director of athletics at Syracuse. Yet you when you think of it, he is the rare person with a spiritual position:

He is our 44 on campus. He is a legend who exemplifies the highest academic and athletic callings.

He was recruited by Ernie Davis himself. He was a three-time football All-American at Syracuse while wearing the most fabled number in Syracuse history. He graduated in 1964, then went on to excel for the Denver Broncos in the National Football League. He is a member of the Hall of Fame for both college and professional football.

After he retired from football, he graduated from the College of Law at the University of Denver. He later completed an executive management training program with the Ford Motor Co. He had a long and successful career as a Ford dealer. He served as president and owner of Pacific Coast Ford. He was widely respected for his generosity toward charitable causes.

In 2011, he returned to his alma mater. One of our greatest legends now spends his days inspiring and mentoring our student athletes. It is a precious gift to have someone like Floyd walking the quad. His demeanor, his passion, is never diminished. The larger Syracuse community reveres him.

As for Sunday's graduation ceremony, it has doubly important meaning for Floyd:

His wife DeBorah will receive her Master's Degree from our School of Education.

Congratulations, Floyd.

You and your fellow honorary degree recipients .... what an extraordinary group of human beings.

You continue to share your talents, commitment and energy with the world. You bring honor, in countless ways, to Syracuse University. By joining us at this reception, you remind us of the limitless potential of every student.

In return, can I simply say:

Welcome home.

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