

Speech by Mark Shriver at the Montgomery County Board of Education on October 24, 2005, on the occasion of the presentation to the Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School a plaque commemorating Senator John F. Kennedy's Commencement Speech to the Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School Class of 1959:

Thank you to Judge Messitte, Dr. Weast and the School Board.

There are so many members of my family who were touched by this effort to commemorate Senator Kennedy's speech -- thank you all very much.

President Kennedy died before I was born and if my math is correct, today's B-CC students were born almost 25 years -- or more -- after he died. So why are we here -- what are we really celebrating tonight? Is it just a rededication of a plaque?

No, I think it is much more -- when you look at the members of the Class of 1959, you see people who were inspired by Senator Kennedy, and later President Kennedy, to give of themselves, to give to the community, to think beyond just themselves. You see people who were -- and are -- committed to the common good. And that common good is not just their home or block, valuable and important as that is, but a common good that extends to other countries and to the ideas that make this country great.

President Kennedy called us forward with hope; he asked us to sacrifice not only for the good of this country, but for the good of mankind and, at the same time, he challenged us all, old and young alike. He challenged us to be Peace Corps workers; he challenged us to be the first country to put a man on the moon; he challenged us to see the people of Berlin as fellow citizens, united in the desire for freedom and justice and peace.

President Kennedy didn't just ask us whether we were better off four years ago; he didn't ask us to defend freedom without sacrifice. Indeed, he knew we Americans could do more, if we were challenged, if we were asked to sacrifice.

And he was right.

In the class of 1959, we see that American high school kids would volunteer to help mankind, and that they would return home and continue to serve America and the very principles that make her great.

I think that if John Kennedy were invited to Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School today, he'd be proud of the great academic success that have been achieved; he'd be proud of the school's commitment to the arts and music education; he'd be proud of the **Grammy** signature school designation and the awards that the *Chips* magazine has won for literary excellence.

But he would also have been proud of the sacrifices that so many student are making, sacrifices that help the greater community: from the Special Olympics club where B-CC students are coaching and/or playing sports with special needs students at Rock Terrace, to the Habitat for Humanity club that is helping build homes for the less-fortunate, to the Spanish Honor Society that is dedicated to service in the Hispanic community. President Kennedy would be proud of these achievements and the sacrifices made to help others.

Finally, I think he'd be proud of the terrific response the B-CC community made after Hurricane Katrina -- the wonderful relationship with Central High School in Baton Rouge, where the B-CC community is helping meet the needs of evacuee students and their families with cash donations, school uniforms, and backpacks; with collections at football games for Central High School and Habitat for Humanity; and, just recently, the junior class's efforts to send music supplies to their peers in Louisiana.

But President Kennedy knew that such efforts lead to much more than just the exchange of supplies. Indeed, he would have truly appreciated the words of Central High School PTA President Kim Jones when she wrote to the B-CC community that the city of Central was so impressed with the B-CC effort that they, in turn, have adopted the town of **Bogalusa**, which is north of New Orleans on the Louisiana-Mississippi line.

So tonight is a celebration of a speech given long ago, but it is much more than that.

Thank you to the Class of 1959 for reminding us all what we truly celebrate is not just a man who left us more than 40 years ago, but the challenge he made to us all:

To strive for excellence

To accomplish what has never been done

To not look inward but to ask what we can do for others.

Mark Shriver, October 24, 2005