



FAVORITES GENEROSITY SPOTLIGHT

SPOTLIGHT ON THE STARS

ADMIN



UMES Fundraising Gala Features Five Celebrities

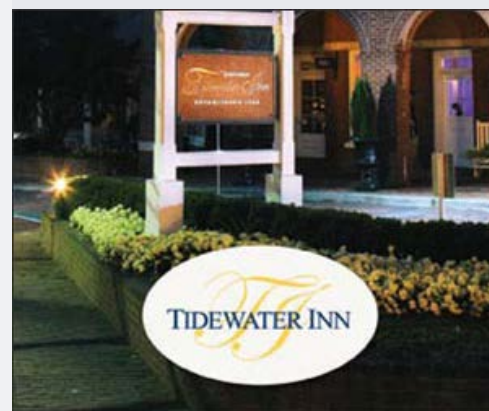
"I've always liked this area. I love the people, the friendliness and openness of them, just the warmth," the elegant Tippi Hedren said sitting among a crowd of VIP guests on the eve of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) Gala in Ocean City. Tastefully dressed in a classic-cut pink suit, enlivened by an animal print top, the longtime Hollywood actress has an air of old-world sophistication that is striking, especially to a young woman of 25.



As insightful as she is stunning, the 82-year-old Hedren, who is best known for her roles in the Alfred Hitchcock films "The Birds" and "Marnie," talks freely about her life outside acting, reflecting on her contributions to humanitarian efforts all over the world.

As part of the weekend's festivities, Hedren and five other celebrities were presented with honorary UMES degrees for their charitable acts during a ceremony prior to the March 3 gala. Hedren received an honorary doctor of public service, while actress S. Epatha Merkerson,

broadcaster Larry King, and performers Billy Davis Jr. and Marilyn McCoo received honorary doctors of humane



letters.

A philanthropist at heart, Hedren volunteered for years with Food for the Hungry, setting up relief programs following natural disasters and war. "We'd travel to areas of the world affected by earthquakes, hurricane, war, or whatever was the problem, and we wouldn't just put a Band-Aid on it; we'd establish programs to help them rebuild houses, get their businesses back together," said the passionate Hedren, who credits her accomplishments off-screen to the morals and sense of dignity her parents instilled in her from a young age.

A true champion of women, one of Hedren's most passionate causes was helping a group of female Vietnamese refugees integrate into American society following the Vietnam War. "I had a lot of affinity for these women and a strong interest in their well-being," Hedren recalls. "They came into a country where the war in Vietnam was not a welcome war; we had suffered through how our own servicemen were treated. So these women came here after losing their families, their country, and then they had to weather all of that resentment."

Recognizing that many of the women were both business-savvy and good with their hands, Hedren brought in typists, seamstresses and her own manicurist from Los Angeles to teach their respective trades. After becoming fascinated with Hedren's fingernails, most of the women took to manicuring, and so started a movement that continues to flourish today. "I am responsible for all of the Vietnamese manicure shops, and I'm so proud of that," Hedren said, still carrying a hint of shock. "Seeing this grow into a huge endeavor has been astounding."



A King with a Heart

As a career broadcaster, Larry King is accustomed to putting others before himself. "It was never about me," says the 78-year-old former host of Larry King Live in his signature deep, raspy tone. "I never used the word, 'I.'" That sentiment is true for his career as an acclaimed interviewer, but also for his efforts off-air as the founder of the Larry King Cardiac Foundation and a benefactor to scholarship funds for disadvantaged students.

As "a kid who never went to college," King called it "a great honor" to receive an honorary degree from UMES. The degree recognizes King's commitment to giving back, as seen through his \$1 million scholarship to George Washington University, which helps underprivileged students majoring in communications pay for their education. King's other main charitable focus, the Larry King Cardiac Foundation, saves probably a

life a day by providing funds to those who need heart procedures, but can't afford them.

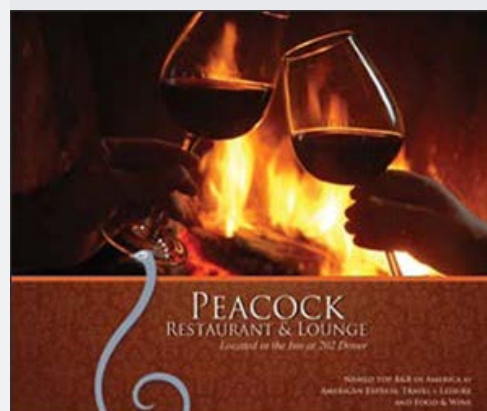
Amid the hype at the VIP reception, King is laid-back yet focused as he mulls over his 55-year career in radio and television between sips of red wine. "I got into interviewing early and I loved it right away," he recalls of his early days in the Miami market. "I thought I'd be a sports announcer, but once I found interviewing ... it was a special niche for me. It came naturally for me, drawing people out."

After interviewing more than 50,000 people – including "Frank Sinatra, Martin Luther King, six presidents, heads of states, bad guys, good guys" – the profound yet unobtrusive King had several insights to share. "What I've learned the most is, one, every person I've interviewed who was a success always had luck involved. If they didn't admit that, they were lying," he says candidly. "Also that every successful person was driven. They were never driven by money; money was the byproduct of what they did. Bill Gates didn't do it for the money; he did it because he loved the idea of computers."

Reeling me in further with his gentle wisdom that seems to come so naturally after a career of educating others, King continues, "And I've learned that people are more alike than they are different, no matter where they are in the world. I've never met a mother who wanted her son to go to war."

Still adjusting to being the interviewee and not the interviewer, King returns to talking about his personal accomplishments, saying, "I've had a lot of luck in my life, too. I always wanted to be a broadcaster, but I had no idea I'd be known all over the world. It still comes as kind of a daily shock to me."

These days, in addition to his charitable endeavors, King is staying busy doing stand-up comedy and soon will be announcing a new venture, which remains his secret for now, he said.



JOIN OUR MAILING LIST

We occasionally send our subscribers emails keeping you up-to-date on news & events.

Email Address

UPCOMING EVENTS



The Subtle Difference Maker

As she walks into the intimate reception at the Courtyard Marriott in Ocean City, actress S. Epatha Merkerson doesn't steal the show. She's not one to "own" a room or demand attention. Dressed simply, yet elegantly in a dark cocktail dress accentuated only by large hoops in her ears and on her wrist, the television, theater and film star is remarkably down-to-earth.

Brushing her short braids away from her face, Merkerson says, "Oh, no," when asked if this is her first time on the

Eastern Shore of Maryland. "I lived in Fort Washington for a time, so we used to come to Ocean City often."

Her effervescent voice draws you into conversation as she begins talking about what an honor it is to receive recognition from UMES for her humanitarian efforts. "Even with the awards I have, this is different," says the longtime "Law and Order" actress, whose character, Lt. Anita Van Buren, is the longest running African-American character in the history of television. "This is special because it's a reflection on my participation in the world."

Most of Merkerson's charitable work involves cancer care and prevention; she is a generous supporter of the American Lung Association, a cause to which she has a personal tie, as her sister is a lung cancer survivor and two of her friends have passed away from the disease.



The Dedicated Duo

Humble and inviting, married couple Billy Davis Jr. and Marilyn McCoo greet each guest who approaches them as if they were an old friend, joking and laughing as they shake hands or hug.

"We are so happy to be here," says McCoo, who looks stunning at 68. "We're very impressed with the wonderful history of UMES, and we were honored that they asked us to be a part of this event."

The seven-time Grammy Award-winning duo has been contributing to scholarship funds for more than 40 years, first as members of the band The 5th Dimension, when they participated in the Lou Rawls Parade of Stars Telethon benefiting the United Negro College Fund. They continue to support that scholarship fund and others today. "We like the idea of providing funds for needy students who have the grades, but just don't have the money," McCoo says, while taking a break from mingling with the crowd.

The couple also is active with the Los Angeles Mission, a nonprofit organization serving the homeless on the streets of Skid Row, as well as with a praise ministry Davis founded in Los Angeles years ago.

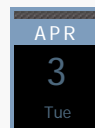
"We support each other in the things that are important to us and the things we have a heart for," says McCoo, who credits the couple's deep-seated friendship as the secret to their successful 42-year marriage, a rarity by show business standards.

"Sometimes when you feel like you're ready to walk away from the marriage, you don't want to walk away from the friendship," she discloses, as Davis shakes his head in agreement.

Lights, Camera, Action!

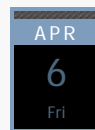
It was a night of glitz and glamour, a star-studded soiree that transformed even the most unlikely celebrity admirers into bright-eyed fawners. There is something about the shared anticipation of a celebrity walking into the room, but five celebrities, "Wow," as my publisher put it. All eyes were on the illustrious guests as they entered the VIP room prior to the UMES Gala, with cameras instantly flashing in applause.

At the outset, King, Hedren, Merkerson, Davis and McCoo seemed to steal the show, but the true celebrities of the evening proved to be the UMES students, who supplied everything from the entertainment to the catering at their college's signature fundraising event. Sounds from the UMES Saxophone Quartet and Jazz Combo



8:00 pm An Acoustic Evening with Shelby Lynne

8:00 pm Los Lobos

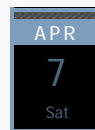


44th Annual Great Delaware Kite Festival

Easter Art & Craft Fair

12:00 pm Easter Decoy & Art Festival

5:00 pm First Friday Gallery Walk



Arbor Day Run

[View Calendar »](#)

[Subscribe](#)



[Add to Google](#)

reverberated throughout the room, as the three-course meal prepared and served by the students of the hotel and restaurant management program was presented in impressive fashion.

A standing ovation ensued, as the students paraded out for their introduction, during which many guests were brought to tears after witnessing the quality of food, service and professionalism displayed by these fine future hospitality professionals. Also contributing to the success of the night were members of the UMES Drama Society and the UMES Jazz Band, who provided entertainment during the cocktail reception.

It was an illustrious evening not soon forgotten. From the celebrities in right to the celebrities in theory, talent was abounding at the UMES Gala. And the University of Maryland Eastern Shore takes great pride in their continued work of discovering and developing talent.



SHARE THIS ARTICLE

[f](#) FACEBOOK [t](#) TWITTER [D](#) DELICIOUS [di](#) DIGG

PREVIOUS ARTICLE

[← A BOATERS TRANSFORMATION](#)

NEXT ARTICLE

[CARRIAGES & CLYDESDALES →](#)