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North Carolina Humanities Council announces winner of state's top humanities award

The board of the North Carolina Humanities Council has selected Dr. Benjamin Eagles Fountain, Jr. as the recipient of the 2006 John Tyler Caldwell Award for the Humanities. The Humanities Council will make the award presentation on Friday, May 4, at 3 p.m. at Wake Technical Community College located at 9101 Fayetteville Road in Raleigh.

Sixteen years after it began, the John Tyler Caldwell Award for the Humanities is recognized as the state's most prestigious public humanities award. It recognizes an individual whose life and work strengthens the educational, cultural, and civic life of North Carolina and helps raise the fundamental questions of meaning in ways that are accessible and imaginative. The Caldwell Award is the only honor given in the state which expressly recognizes the value of an understanding and appreciation of the humanities in everyday and public life.

The Humanities Council named the award for the late Dr. John Tyler Caldwell, former chancellor of North Carolina State University from 1959-1975 and one of five founding members of the Humanities Council.

The North Carolina Humanities Council is a 36-year-old nonprofit foundation dedicated to the humanities and a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Humanities Council's goal is to help people come together with other North Carolinians to explore the state's history, identity, and culture. Last year, the Humanities Council sponsored more than 310 programs in 80 of the state's 100 counties. (See attachment for details on the Humanities Council's programs)

The Humanities Council honors Dr. Benjamin Eagles Fountain, Jr. with the Caldwell Award for his role as one of North Carolina's most effective educators. Born in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, Fountain received his undergraduate and graduate degrees from UNC Chapel Hill, where he also taught. He held positions as the executive secretary of the North Carolina State School Boards Association and the Superintendent of Elizabeth City Schools.

Fountain began his work with the North Carolina Community College System in 1965 when he was chosen to turn a small technical school into Lenoir Community College. While serving as president of the college, Fountain pioneered the first local history collection and program in a community college. He also helped the institution expand to 58 acres and become accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Subscribing to an "open door policy," he insisted it was "a policy of opportunity, not a policy of guaranteed success."

In 1971, Fountain became the second president of the community college system during its formative years as 57 colleges established permanent campuses, earned collegiate accreditation, and expanded to include 121,000 fulltime students and a half million part-time students. During his system presidency, he helped start *The Quarterly Community College Review* at NC State University, served as founding chair

of the editorial board for the scholarly publication, and was one of the founding members of the committee that led to the creation of the North Carolina Humanities Council. He also helped create the Visiting Artists Program which placed artists in rural communities across the state through community college campuses.

In 1978, Fountain stepped down to become president of Isothermal Community College in Rutherfordton, wishing to get back onto campus with students, faculty and library books. After sheparding an increase in the institution's enrollment and faculty and improving facilities, Fountain retired in 1985.

Fountain then took a job at NC State, teaching in the program that prepares community college administrators. While there, he helped compile the book *Community Colleges in the US: 49 State Systems*, a capsule summary of each the 49 systems across the country.

Fountain currently serves as vice president of the Raleigh chapter of the National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, and he is the chair of the board for the Peace College Foundation. He recently completed 250-year history of his Edgecombe County family and is currently researching and writing the history of an Edgecombe County military company campaign during the Civil War.

Past Caldwell Laureates are Louis D. Rubin, Jr. 2005, Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans 2004, Wilma Dykeman† and Hugh Morton† 2003, Reynolds Price 2002, Houston Gwynne (H.G.) Jones 2001, Thomas J. Lassiter, Jr.† 2000, William C. Friday 1999, Dorothy Spruill Redford 1998, Charles Bishop Kuralt† 1997, William W. Finlator† 1996, John Marsden Ehle 1995, Anne Firor Scott 1994, Samuel Talmadge Ragan† 1993, Doris Waugh Betts 1992, John Hope Franklin 1991, and Dr. John Tyler Caldwell 1990†. († deceased)

The Humanities Council officially adds Fountain to the laureate list on Friday, May 4 at 3 p.m. in the Conference Room of the Student Services Building on the campus of Wake Technical Community College.

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