

by Audrey R. Browka

A portrait of Calvin Darden '72, a Black man with a mustache, wearing a dark pinstriped suit jacket, a white shirt, and a yellow and blue striped tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

passing THE
torch

The Jesuit Tradition of Service

Like most college seniors planning life after graduation, Calvin Darden had high hopes for the future. He knew that if he worked hard he could make a difference. But Cal probably never imagined that his professional and personal achievements would provide him with the opportunity of a lifetime — carrying the Olympic torch in Sydney, Australia.

Just a few weeks before beginning his senior year at Canisius, Cal married his high school friend and classmate, Patricia Ellis. Four weeks later he took his first job unloading tractor-trailers part-time at United Parcel Service in Buffalo. With a new job, a new wife and a demanding class load at Canisius, times were a bit challenging for this ambitious college student.

"I worked three hours a day making \$3 an hour," recalled Cal. "At \$9 a day, that was \$45 a week. The government took out \$9 in taxes, so we had \$36 a week. That was our grocery money."

Patricia worked full time to pay the rest of the bills so Cal could finish college. Things were a bit hectic for Cal that year (to say the least), but 29 years later his life has yet to slow down.

Now a father of three grown children (Calvin Jr., Tami and Lorielle), Cal is a deacon at his church, a community service leader and still working for UPS. Only now, he is a senior vice president

"I never planned on staying at UPS past graduation," said Cal. "I graduated in May of 1972 and really only planned on working there until I graduated."

But when UPS offered him a full-time position, at an above average wage, Cal accepted. The rest, as they say, is history. The more Cal learned about the company, the more he realized it was a corporation on the rise and just the place where he could build a career. So, Cal decided it was time to put his Canisius management degree to work. For a year and a half he tirelessly loaded and unloaded trailers at the Buffalo hub. Then, in January of 1974, his hard work paid off. UPS promoted him to customer service supervisor – his first management assignment. That position was just one of several management jobs Cal would hold at United Parcel Service, but he says it was the one that taught him the most about the ethics of work and life.

"I learned very quickly that one of the most important aspects of being a good manager is being able to motivate

people," noted Cal. "You can't motivate people with a 2 x 4. That doesn't work. Instead, I found that if they believe in you as a person then they respect you and you can get just about any job done."

That philosophy propelled Cal through the ranks at UPS. Twelve management positions and six moves later, Cal is now senior vice president of the world's largest package distribution company. Working out of the company headquarters in Atlanta, Cal is responsible for all U.S. operations, which includes 320,000 employees, \$28 billion in revenue and the promise that UPS will meet its commitment for the pick-up and delivery of 13.5 million packages every day from eight million customers. It is a position that Cal is proud to hold, but he is quick to point out that a manager is never stronger than his or her people make him.

"I am a firm believer in treating people the way you want to be treated," he explained. "It's the small things that really count with people and that go a tremendous way towards building respect and communication, and breaking down walls."

Cal's commitment to United Parcel Service is unparalleled. Rarely does he work a day shorter than 10 or 12 hours and in his 29 years of service with the company, Cal has never missed a single day of work! Still, his sense of responsibility to the community energizes him to do more.

"It's always been important for me to give back to the community, in money and in time," said Cal. "When I look behind

me, the youngsters who are coming up are the future leaders of tomorrow. If they're not taught ethics, integrity or how to build moral character, then our world is going to change."

A trustee on the National Urban League Board, Cal is co-founder of the League's Black Executive Exchange Program (BEEP). BEEP recruits black managers, often times from UPS, to visit historically black colleges and universities. These managers then spend a few days, in various classes and talk to students about the discipline needed to be successful. It is a quality Cal says he first learned



Cal Darden is greeted by a crowd of thousands following the completion of his 400 meter run with the Olympic torch.





Cal Darden at the National Urban League 2000 Conference with (from L to R) Rev. Jesse Jackson; unidentified; Kenneth Lewis, president and CEO of Bank of America; Hugh Price, president and CEO of National Urban League; David Dinkens, former New York City mayor; and Rev. Dr. Joseph Lowery, former president of Southern Christian Leadership Conference.



at Canisius.

“When I entered Canisius in 1968, I think I was only one of nine minority students there,” he recalled. “But I will never forget, and I still tell

people about, the ethics I learned at Canisius. The priests and the instructors all wore long black robes and taught as if you only had one class to attend in your lifetime – and that was theirs! It was nothing for a Jesuit to say ‘we need you to report on this novel two days from now.’ A novel! A full novel! I learned a lot about life and the way things should be because of the way Canisius was structured.”

And he has structured his life to include an abundance of community service work. In addition to his work with the National Urban League, Cal also volunteers with the 100 Black Men of North Metro Atlanta. A localized version of the National Urban League, the organization is made up of vice presidents, senior vice presidents and CEOs in Atlanta who mentor the city’s youngsters and educate them on how to become successful.

“You blow all the smoke away and you tell them what to expect,” explained Cal. “For example, I talk to students about

the importance of coming to school everyday. I talk to them about the importance of taking the proper courses at school. I talk to young men about not getting into trouble with the law. I talk to young women about not having babies out of wedlock. And I talk to them about the importance of staying off drugs.”

Helping those who may be less fortunate is nothing new for Cal. He has been an active member of the United Way since the early 1980s. Most recently, he served as the UPS corporate chair for the 2001-2001 United Way campaign. Under his command, UPS raised a record \$46 million for the United Way: \$38 million from its employees and an \$8 million corporate contribution.

Humble about his service work, Cal, who is a deacon at Atlanta’s Deliverance Temple Church of God and Christ, credits his deep roots in the church for his commitment to community.

“I have been very, very blessed by God to have the family that I have, to have the job that I have and to be blessed to move up through United Parcel Service,” he said. “So I think it is my responsibility, for some of the mistakes that I may have made and for some of the lessons that I may have learned the hard way, to teach the young people

what it takes to make it in this great world we live in.”

Cal adds that his job with UPS provides him numerous opportunities to become involved in the community. He also acknowledges that his work with United Parcel Service has afforded him a few personal opportunities as well. One of his most memorable experiences was this past summer. Cal served as a torch bearer at the Olympic games in Sydney. He carried the flame 400 meters (about five city blocks) while more than 50,000 people cheered him on.

“I was chosen because UPS was a sponsor of the games,” stated Cal. “It was incredible. There were thousands of people lined up and down the street as far as I could see! The torch meant so much that after the run, some people just wanted to touch it. When they did, tears would just start flowing down their faces. Words can’t describe it!”

Never in his life did Cal Darden imagine he would be privileged to carry an Olympic torch. But some might say he is a natural torch bearer. As a leader in his profession, community and a man committed to educating the nation’s future leaders, Cal Darden is showing thousands the way. And he still has no intentions of slowing down. ■