

2014 Silver Spur Comments – Remo & Ami Belli

Thank you. It is indeed an honor and distinct pleasure to be here with all of you this evening. I am thrilled that I have the opportunity to bestow this special award on Remo and Ami in recognition of their selfless service to others, their spirit, and their long friendship with College of the Canyons.

The Silver Spur Award is a unique and distinguished honor, which is clearly evident when you look at the past honorees. This select group of women and men have, over time, shown themselves to be people of incomparable character, who do the right things for the right reasons, and who use their considerable influence to make things better for others. At the same time, they are people who have the courage to do things in their own unique ways.

As Henry David Thoreau said, “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.”

It is fitting then, that we are here tonight to honor two people who perfectly match that description and not only march to a different drummer, but also have designed their own drums to the enlightenment and joy of people from every corner of the world.

The story of Remo and Ami Belli is an inspiring one: That of two visionaries brought together by love, who combined their unique, individual passions and created results that are far beyond what either might have accomplished alone. They serve as an example for us all, showing us what we can accomplish when we match our own vision with courage, commitment, passion and unwavering tenacity and resilience.

Joel A. Barker said, “Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. Vision with action can change the world.” Remo and Ami have combined vision with action, and made their own kind of music in ever so many ways.

I feel so fortunate that I have had a chance to get to know Remo and Ami personally, to visit them in Paso Robles, and to even ride on the John Deere tractor with Remo! And, I’m so thankful we have a bit of Paso Robles growing on our campus now. Remo and Ami recently gave us California Zinfandel grape vines from their vineyard, which we planted to establish our first-ever vineyard, with help from Pulchella

Winery. The timing is perfect, as we plan to open our Culinary Arts Institute at the Valencia Campus later this year.

It is humbling to receive such as a gift, given Remo and Ami's passion for wine, and the history of these vines. The vines stand apart in the world of winemaking. Their fruit is highly sought after and renowned for its consistent quality and rich flavors.

In much the same way, Remo and Ami stand apart. They too are renowned for their consistency. Certain qualities resonate like a steady rhythm throughout their lives – courage, commitment, passion and resilience. It is these qualities that have enabled them to achieve their visions.

A vision is nothing more than a clear idea of what you intend to accomplish. Jonathan Swift is famous for saying, "Vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others." Remo and Ami are clearly visionaries, a quality evident early in their lives. Both saw possibilities far beyond those in which they were raised. Sons of Italian immigrants who grew up in the Midwest during the Great Depression didn't become professional musicians. They went to work. And it must have been even more unimaginable for a young woman in the Philippines to dream of a career, let alone a career in medicine.

Poet e.e. Cummings put it this way: "To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting." To their credit, Remo and Ami were not content with the status quo expectations of their genders, their ethnicities, nor their socio-economic status. They shrugged off the

limits others accepted, and instead focused on what they knew to be true in themselves, and then followed their hearts, their dreams, and their visions.

Fulfilling a vision requires the steady beat of courage. Anais Nin said, “Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.” Settling for others’ expectations is easy. The familiarity of what you know is comfortable and safe. It’s not easy to go against the grain, to transform stereotypes rather than be conformed by them. Following your vision and venturing into the unknown brings risk. Remo had the courage to leave family in the Midwest, and later New York, to be where the music was. Ami’s vision required an equal amount of bold action – leaving the Philippines for the United States. Risk takes you places you don’t expect to go, but courage lets you go there.

Risk forces you to challenge your concept of who you are and what you can accomplish, but courage gives you the power to redefine

yourself. Risk brings the threat of failure. But also the promise of reward. Remo took a risk in developing a drumhead from synthetic materials when everyone else was using calfskin. And Ami stepped out of the mainstream to pursue alternative medicine, against the advice of friends and colleagues. In so doing, both Remo and Ami echo this truth shared by T. S. Eliot, who said: “Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.”

Beyond courage, it took commitment to follow their vision, another quality that consistently echoes throughout their stories. Ken Blanchard explains commitment this way: “There is a difference between interest and commitment. When you're interested in something, you do it only when it's convenient. When you're committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results.”

Seeing a vision fulfilled is not something that happens quickly. It can be a time-consuming process convincing others of something that initially

only you can see. Without commitment – the willingness to stay true to yourself and your vision over the long haul – you’ll never change long-held beliefs. You’ll never convince others that what you see is indeed real. Author and speaker Simon Sinek urged, “Don't quit. Never give up trying to build the world you can see, even if others can't see it. Listen to your drum and your drum only. It's the one that makes the sweetest sound.” And in fact, Remo and Ami have done just that in their commitment to blending music and medicine, which has yielded the sweet sounds of comfort and therapy in the lives of many.

As committed as they are to their work, it is clear that Remo and Ami are committed to each other. Married for 39 years, they have formed a nurturing partnership that has enabled them to blend their individual visions into a collective vision. The results are far more powerful than we even imagined. He was exploring music, and she was exploring

medicine – two areas in which most of us would not see any commonalities. And yet, Remo and Ami have shown us they do intersect, and those connections create powerful healing potential beyond what conventional wisdom would say is possible. Again, they saw what was invisible to others and through their commitment to their vision, and to one another, have achieved what others never imagine.

Consistent rhythm marks the relationship between Remo and Ami – and I believe that distinctly defines and has enhanced their success – as evidenced in their individual passions, which characterize what they do together. Benjamin Disraeli said “Man is only great when he acts from passion.” And the same is true for women. A vision cannot be fulfilled without passion. It is passion that sustains courage and commitment. It is passion that continues to move dreams forward in the face of doubts and fears. It is passion that inspires people to follow their vision wherever it might lead.

Both Remo and Ami demonstrate a passion for excellence in every interchange, in everything they do.

- It is evident in their innate curiosity and desire for discovery.
- It is what drove Remo to develop a synthetic drumhead.
- And fifty years later, when others of his reputation and stature are inclined to retire, or at least hand off things to others, it is what keeps him out on the factory floor personally designing the next product.

For Ami:

- It's that passion that keeps her at the forefront of research, constantly forming new theories, questioning existing beliefs, and pushing to expand the boundaries of current knowledge.
- Her passion has altered our perceptions about the power of music and medicine, and resulted in the development of ground-

breaking instruments that have been introduced into the medical profession.

Their passion for excellence is fueled by a passion for **selfless service to others**. Woodrow Wilson said, “You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand.” Remo and Ami have indeed enriched the world.

- Whether by opening the Remo Recreational Music Center in North Hollywood,
- Playing a leadership role in the American Music Therapy Association,
- Establishing the HealthRHYTHMS division of Remo,
- Sponsoring studies at UCLA, or

- Establishing the Beat the Odds program.

Remo and Ami have shown an uncommon dedication to touching lives and making the world a better place.

We have seen that firsthand at College of the Canyons. They have helped make us a better place. We are particularly indebted to Remo and Ami for the many ways they have partnered with us, and shown their support for our own initiatives to improve the lives of those we serve.

- They established drum circles as a fundraiser for Early Childhood Education Center, providing the drums and facilitators for the events, and donated a drum-shaped play structure.
- As well, they provided in-kind donations to our Music Department, equipping our students with drum kits and other musical equipment.

- Naturally, they have been very supportive of our Performing Arts Center, serving as Patrons of the Performing Arts, and helping to establish an endowment for the center.
- They have a particular interest in incorporating the arts into the classroom experience for children.
- They feel that educators, business leaders and artists have a responsibility to come together and work to make that happen.
- And, they have led the way, as was so evident when we hosted the Rock the Rhythm, Beat the Odds event on our campus, which brought together elementary and middle school students from all five local school districts.

The headlines from that event focused on the attempt to set a world record for the largest drum circle. But the event was so much more.

It was the culmination of a months-long effort that saw facilitators visit classrooms through the valley to share music and drumming with local

students. Those students were able to experience firsthand the power of the arts, and have an opportunity to express themselves.

At the same time, the event served to highlight the touch of genius behind the vision that Remo and Ami pursue. It tied together their multiple passions and showcased the power of music and cooperation.

Earlier this week I listened to presentation on Albert Einstein that focused on the characteristics that contributed to how he did what he did and led to the accomplishments that earned him the label of genius.

Remo and Ami share many of these same characteristics. As Einstein was, Remo and Ami are:

- About solutions
- Curious
- Confident
- Determined
- Dreamers
- Emotional

- Energetic
- Focused
- Fun
- Imaginative
- Intuitive
- Musical
- Optimistic
- Obsessive
- Passionate
- Resourceful
- Spontaneous
- Visual
- Well-read

On a personal level, it is an absolute delight to spend time with Remo and Ami. They are among the most grounded, humble, generous people you could ever hope to meet. In the music business, the Remo

name is legendary. He is someone who has seen everything and everyone. Whether it was in the early years when he was playing, or later making drums, he is on a first-name basis with the most famous musicians of our time. But there is no trace of a rock-star ego, or sense of entitlement.

Instead, I find a couple who exude warmth and compassion and who care deeply and genuinely about others. And although we are gathered here in the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, they are not interested in stage or spotlight, or being stars. Instead, they seek to make stars of others.

But tonight, we have the privilege of shining the spotlight on Remo and Ami. It is our opportunity to recognize their vision and applaud their courage, commitment and passion for making their own kind of music and singing their own kind of songs. Given all they have done to shape music, broaden medicine, and touch lives in our community and around

the world, we are forever in their debt. This award is an expression of the gratitude that fills our hearts, and serves to express our appreciation and admiration.

So please join me in honoring Remo and Ami Belli as we present them with the 2014 College of the Canyons Foundation Silver Spur Award for Community Service.