Campus

Focus Award recipient speaks on overcoming limitations

Blind businessman battles perceptions

By Heather Poston
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Even though he was blind, he still had to do household chores just like his seven brothers and sisters.

Jim Gibbons, president and CEO of National Industries for the Blind and Purdue Alumnus, spoke about his upbringing during the "Freedom from Exclusion" reception honoring the 2004 Focus Award recipients.

"I was raised with the expectation that I would succeed," said Gibbons, a former Purdue Old Master who graduated with an Industrial Engineering degree and later became the first blind person to earn an MBA in Business and Administration from Harvard.

Gibbons spoke about many times in his life when he realized that he needed to change peoples' perceptions of himself rather than lower his own expectations.

"I always thought I could do more for the blind by being successful," said Gibbons, who found that it was better to help the blind by addressing challenges and finding solutions to these challenges, like finding a job.

Gibbons, who said he had good grades throughout college, was never offered as many job opportunities as that of his friends with "less than stellar" grades. The interviews were quite an awakening for Gibbons.

"When the interviewer called my name, I would get out my cane, walk to toward the voice and shake their hand and say, 'Hi, I'm Jim Gibbons.' And although I couldn't see their face, I couldn't tell the shock in their voice when they saw that I was blind," said Gibbons.

Gibbons' struggle with finding a job eventually led to his position with the National Industries for the Blind, which has helped more than 5,000 blind individuals find jobs.

The phrase his father told him years ago still resonates today and affects the way in which he helps others.

"Winners never quit and quitters never win," said Gibbons.

This attitude was similar to the award recipients who were honored for their contributions in the areas of disability, diversity and accessibility.

James McGlothin, associate professor in the School of Health Sciences, is a faculty member who has worked with technology that allows the world to see from the perspective of a wheelchair through videography. He said he was pleased with the University's response to his findings.

"It's not the information we gathered (that's important), it's how Purdue responded to this information," said McGlothin, who was glad to see all of the challenges that were found were later addressed by the University.

Other award recipients include Paula Micka Pugh, Kathleen Kisselburg and an organization called Tactile Access to Education for Visually Impaired Students.