Butler Lives On Through Butler Medals

Three honored at December ceremony

By Kristina Sabol

Beginning in 1914, Nicholas Murray Butler Medals—in bronze, silver and gold—have been awarded every five years for contributions to philosophy and education. In addition, today’s Butler Medals commemorate the former Columbia president for whom they were named.

In his 1931 Nobel Peace Prize presentation, Nicholas Butler was lauded for his “tireless energy and a zeal almost without parallel.” Today’s medal recipients are judged to have enhanced the vitality of university life through a similar passion and commitment.

In keeping with these traditions, a ceremony held last month at the home of Columbia University president Lee C. Bollinger bestowed silver medals on three individuals who have made distinguished contributions to Columbia: Schuyler Chapin, an Emmy award-winning producer and activist in the arts community of New York City; Kenneth Jackson, Jacques Barzun Professor of History and the Social Sciences at Columbia; and Henry L. King, senior counselor at Davis Polk & Wardwell and a Columbia Trustee Emeritus.

King has continued the tradition of the Butler Medal in honor of the high standards of education and leadership that Nicholas Murray Butler set for the University so many years ago, remarked Bollinger. “The honorees embody those standards and their accomplishments have left an indelible mark on the University’s rich history.”

Chapin was recognized for his contributions to the arts on Columbia’s campus. As Dean Emeritus of Columbia’s School of the Arts (SOA), he played an active role in the University’s establishment of graduate programs in the arts. Under his watch, SOA’s enrollment more than doubled.

Kenneth Jackson was recognized for his work on ‘Columbia 250,’ the University’s anniversary celebration held in 2004. An urban and social historian and former president of the New York Historical Society, Jackson worked for more than seven years to bring his vision of the annivers­ary celebration to life.

Henry L. King, an alumnus of Columbia College, class of 1948, was likewise recognized for his work on ‘Columbia 250’—along with his many years of service to the University. He is a past president of both the Columbia College Alumni Association and of the Columbia University Alumni Federation. Joining the University Trustees in 1985, he served for 12 years, the last three as chair.

“I am proud to be associated with a university as rich in tradition and excellence as Columbia,” said King, summing up the feelings of all three medal recipients. “It is an honor to receive the Butler Medal, particularly because of my long-standing relationship with Columbia. Nicholas Murray Butler was an exemplary president whose leadership has continued to the present day.”

Current trustees Marilyn雀aine and Joan Spero presided over the ceremony on behalf of the entire board. Butler biographer Michael Rosenthal (see profile, opposite) was a guest of honor at the presentation.

Local Students in Their Element at Columbia Science Fair

Ripe with sizzling chemical reactions and small (but controlled) fires, the Department of Chemistry and the University’s National Science Foundation GK-12 Programs cohosted a scientific forum that brought nearly 400 elementary and middle school students to Alfred Lerner Hall on Saturday, Dec. 17.

The conference kicked off with a discussion in Havemeyer Hall (considered a national historic chemical landmark) on the public’s perception of science. McGill University chemistry professor Joe Schwarz, an award-winning television and radio host and the author of several science books, moderated a panel of leading Columbia University experts. Their discus­sions ranged from how to improve scientists’ interaction with journalists to the need to make science “cool” for young people.

On behalf of the latter goal, Schwarz, whom kids like to call “Dr. Joe,” gave live demon­strations of everyday chemical reactions, showing, for instance, how materials can be changed from solid to liquid by adding energy. At the interactive booths in Lerner Hall, children were able to visit displays ranging from flash-freezing and liquid nitrogen to the science behind light bulbs.

Columbia is a beneficiary of two NSF GK-12 grants that are administered separately through the Graduate School of Arts and Science and the Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. Both in collabora­tion with Teachers College. The long-term goals of the NSF programs are to cultivate graduate training while fostering institutional networks that include Columbia’s schools and centers.

For more information, go to http://elements.columbia.edu.