

**The Pinnacle Awards  
October 19, 2007**

**Remarks  
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President and CEO  
The Greater Houston Partnership**

**“Celebrating the Power and Potential of Innovation”**

Since we’re celebrating great American innovators, I’d like to talk about a man who has had a profound effect on this country and the people who live here.

His career started at age 10, when he went to work in a machine shop. As he got older, he taught himself about electricity and mechanics. In 1884, he started a company that made and sold telephone, telegraph, and electrical equipment.

Three years later, he invented a process that made history. It was called the Synchronous Multiplex Railway Telegraph, and it allowed trains to communicate with each other and with stations.

For the first time, dispatchers and engineers knew the location of any train at any hour. The invention greatly reduced the number of collisions and accidents – a problem that threatened public confidence in the railways. In other words, it revolutionized transportation in America.

Over the years, this man was responsible for more than a dozen devices that improved electric railway cars and a number of others that controlled the flow of electricity. He received 45 patents for inventions that changed the face of the communications and transportation industries. A Cincinnati newspaper called him “equal, if not superior to, any inventor in the country.”

I’d be willing to bet that if you asked average Americans who this man was, they might answer Alexander Graham Bell. That would be wrong – though Bell purchased one of his inventions.

Or they might say Thomas Edison – which would be wrong, too, though Edison sued him claiming theft of an invention. Edison lost. Twice.

No, this man’s name was Granville T. Woods, and he was an African-American, and he was indeed one of this country’s greatest. Sadly, outside of a few business circles, his name and accomplishments are largely unknown.

And that is one of the reasons I feel so honored to be here tonight:

Because the Pinnacle Awards put a spotlight on individuals whose vision, persistence, dedication, and creativity deserves our recognition and demands our respect.

I am confident there are people here who, like Granville Woods, will change our lives. And I am equally confident that the Greater Houston Partnership will play a role in supporting you by shaping an economic climate that fosters success among African-American businesses.

Given the strengths of this region, we certainly have a solid foundation to build upon. But don't take my word for it. Listen to how *Black MBA* magazine described Houston:

"Entrepreneurs benefit from a city that believes that hard work will pay off. Houston is the fourth largest city in the United States. Businesses thrive in 19 different commercial centers. It is one of 12 world-class communities for manufacturing. Another draw for Houston is the fact that the city has no personal state income tax. Businesses enjoy access to world markets as the sixth largest port, and the fourth largest airport system in the U.S."

It doesn't stop there, either.

*Fortune* Magazine has ranked us No. 1 in the country for fastest-growing companies. *Forbes* rates us No. 3 for business and careers. *Black Enterprise* named us America's No. 4 city for African-Americans. We're the 8<sup>th</sup> fastest-growing metro area for women-owned businesses and in the Top 10 for both Hispanic- and Asian-owned firms.

That may not be too surprising given that we're one of the most diverse, most international cities in the country. Yet even with that diversity, I think if you look deeply into the hopes and hearts of anyone who lives here, you'll see a common truth. Because at the end of the day, we all want the same thing:

The chance for a better life for ourselves and our families. To paraphrase Barbara Jordan, we want a Houston that is as good as its promise.

At the Partnership, we're working to fulfill that promise.

In 2005, we created a 10-year strategic plan that seeks to make Greater Houston a magnet for jobs and global commerce and establish the region as one of the top four business locations in the country.

It is ambitious in scope, and sets some equally ambitious goals: 600,000 new net jobs, \$60 billion in new capital investment, and \$120 billion in new foreign trade. Beyond that, it identifies a number of industry clusters that will be the focus of our efforts to reach those goals – including energy, healthcare, aerospace, petrochemical, and technology.

But we're also focusing on another cluster that may be of particular interest to many of the businesses represented here this evening: The entrepreneurial segment.

Although we may well be known as a "city of industry," the fact remains that this is also a region of 85,000 small businesses – built by men and women whose can-do spirit is an expression of our progress. They are visionaries, creators, and builders.

Our plan will build upon that strength by shaping a dynamic economy that delivers what entrepreneurs and small enterprises need to participate in – and contribute to – a future of regional prosperity:

A well-developed information technology sector...a talented workforce...a business-friendly environment... low costs of living...ease of doing business...a great quality of life.

It's a strategy for growth...for opportunity...and for the future. But more than that, it's a strategy to help you create wealth.

Granville T. Woods never had the chance to maximize the profit potential of his inventions. He could not compete with large corporations. He spent much of his later life in court, defending his patent rights. When he died in 1910, he was virtually penniless.

That a man who devoted his life to the cause of progress should be forgotten rather than celebrated is wrong. It was wrong then, and it is wrong now. None of us wants to live in a world where the remarkable potential of remarkable people goes unrealized.

So in closing, let me make this commitment to you:

As an organization, the Greater Houston Partnership will do whatever we can to keep this region growing, and to be an aggressive advocate for you, your businesses, and your prosperity.

And by doing so, we will join you in igniting the pathway to entrepreneurial greatness now – and for many years to come.

Thank you all very much.