

The SciTech Science Lecture Series

Echoing the sounds of Washington, DC across the campus twice within the past decade with visits by two sitting Presidents is no small feat for a community college. However, that is the history revolving around Forsyth Technical Community College who hosted President George W. Bush in 2003 and President Barack Obama in December 2010. As the national spotlight beamed on the college, the reputation and notoriety of its students and faculty were exposed to the whole country and beyond, creating a “Sputnik Moment.” This “Sputnik Moment” was just one of the showcases celebrating the college’s 50th Anniversary and the beginning of several events throughout the year.



US President Barack Obama during his visit to the Biotech Labs at Forsyth Tech

With the tagline of “The First Fifty Years: A Legacy of Learning,” the challenge was ever present to produce a showcase of events of common interest for the student body, faculty and community. Needless to say, the Presidential visit would always loom as the event that brought

national attention to the college and particularly with the President inviting one of our graduating Biotechnology students to Washington for the State of the Union Address. However, the showcasing of the college had begun much earlier in the year with a faculty brainstorming session searching for innovative ideas to celebrate the college’s 50th Anniversary. From this discussion, the SciTech Science Lecture Series was born with a goal of featuring a series of high-profile speakers who would visit the college and present on their area of knowledge and expertise.



Dr. Frank Torti explaining the advances of cancer treatment during September’s lecture

As the search for speakers began, the question arose as to which area of science to spotlight. Having the good fortune of living in the Piedmont Triad area with its many medical, research and technology facilities, the pool of candidates was nearly endless. The SciTech Team was able to tap into a resource of very prominent, high profile people from the community, as well as local colleges and abroad.



Forsyth Tech’s President, Dr. Gary Green, with October’s guest speaker, Dr. Mark Wainberg

To begin the new academic year, the first lecture was scheduled in September 2010 with Dr. Frank Torti, Director of Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center’s Comprehensive Cancer Center, who began the series with the topic of better approaches in treating cancer and

providing cures, quality of life enhancement and prolongation of life. In October Dr. Mark Wainberg, who is a world-renowned Canadian AIDS researcher and activist, and who has made major contributions to the study and treatment of HIV/AIDS, presented to the college and community guests.

Within our community of contacts, the SciTech Team was fortunate enough to have Mr. Steven Burke present for the month of November 2010. As the President and CEO of Biofuels Center of North Carolina, Mr. Burke spoke on finding new alternatives for the use of fossil fuels. The New Year of 2011 began with an exciting lecture by Dr. Anthony Atala from Wake Forest's Institute for Regenerative Medicine who addressed the new technology and research in growing new organs from human cells. February produced one of our own instructors, Dr. Frank Carver, who lectured on how his visit to Liberia, Africa changed his life, his teaching philosophies, and gave him a global understanding of environmental issues in that part of the world.



Dr. Frank Carver signing autographs after his lecture

The last and final lecture for the season headlined Dr. Donald deBethizy, CEO and President of Targacept, a biopharmaceutical company from Winston-Salem that is engaged in the design, discovery and development of a new class of drugs for diseases and disorders of the nervous system. Dr. deBethizy presented some of his strategies for guiding Targacept's capital-raising activities to more than \$240 million through public and private financings. His reputation of growing a company from its foundation and taking its successes and notoriety to Wall Street has earned him many awards.

To encourage the success of the SciTech events, the team's goal has been to have each person attending the lecture leave with a new set of facts, an expanded knowledge of what was on the cutting-edge of scientific research and the latest discoveries in advanced technology. During the Q&A section of the lectures, the speakers were amazed at the advanced level of questions posed by the audience, attesting to their attention and interest in the subject matter. To further this knowledge base, an informational package was made available at the sign-in table that provided specifics on the speaker and his presentation. Most lectures were recorded by technicians who would, in turn, convert it to a DVD to become a video library of lectures. To ensure that each series was well received in all areas, student volunteers were selected to assist with registration, parking and giving directions. Attendance for the six lectures exceeded all expectations with numbers totaling over 1000. All of these lectures were presented in the college's auditorium.



An audience gathered in the Ardmore Auditorium awaiting one of our series speakers.

It was the hope of the team that this would be a learning experience for all those in attendance and for that reason the SciTech Team decided to survey their last audience to gauge the success of the series. Written surveys were included in the package handouts to each attendee asking for their input and evaluation of the speakers and series as a whole. The audience gave an overwhelming “thumbs up” on the speakers and the contents of their lectures. Everyone indicated that the lecturers’ subjects were very scientific, intellectual, engaging, informative and worthwhile.

From these surveys and in the team’s opinion, these lectures have strengthened Forsyth Tech’s partnerships with the many businesses, organizations, manufacturing and biotechnology firms, medical establishments and other educational institutions with which it is affiliated. Another local community college brought an entire class to hear these high-profile speakers. Salem College and Winston-Salem State University were also represented and at the conclusion of each lecture, a “buzz” was echoed around campus with students and faculty inquiring what would be offered next and who would be our next speaker. In other words, SciTech was becoming a branded name on campus and in the community.

To each success there is a challenge and the SciTech team is left with the daunting question of “where do we go from here?” With the line-up of high caliber speakers featured in the 2010-2011 SciTech Lecture Series, who do we propose to offer for the new academic year of 2011-2012?

As Forsyth Tech’s 50th year fades into the sunset and the beginning of “51” approaches, the team is once again challenged to rise to the occasion to carry on the legacy of The SciTech Science Lecture Series. To this end, the SciTech attendees, supporters and sponsors are encouraged to keep a vigilant eye on the college’s radar for the next line-up of great speakers.

