

## Presentation of the Distinguished Public Service Medal of 2003 to George Harlow

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Mr. President, Honorees and Guests, Members of MSA:

In 1976, George Harlow arrived on the scene of the American Museum of Natural History to set up shop as the resident mineralogist and crystallographer and take his place in the long and distinguished line of curators of one of the world's great gem and mineral collections. I suspect that at the time he did not fully appreciate the breadth of responsibilities and opportunities that awaited him. From the specialized and often insulated world of mineralogical research, George had stepped into one of the most public mineralogy positions in the world. But, George enthusiastically embraced the dual roles of mineralogical researcher and educator, which have become the hallmark of his career.

Of course, for museums the principal medium for public education is the exhibition, and George was quickly pulled into that arena. He co-curated "Its Gold" in 1979–1980, and in fact, I first laid eyes on George as the star of a media presentation on gold produced for that exhibition. He remains the ever-youthful mineralogical leading man in showings even today in museums around the world. In 1988, he curated a special exhibit: "Tiffany: 150 Years of Gems and Jewelry" and in 1992 one on "Global Warming." These exhibits and many other outreach experiences, and the continued popularity of the Museum's Hall of Gems and Minerals, impressed upon George the public's inherent fascination with gems and minerals, and that in particular, gems could serve as an effective and unimposing introduction to the broader subjects of mineralogy and petrology. And thus, he conceived, promoted and curated his exhibit magnum opus "The Nature of Diamonds." More than four years in the making, this spectacular exhibition opened at the American Museum of Natural History to great public fanfare in November 1997. It is one of the most notable mineralogically related special exhibits of our time. There is no doubt that it would not have happened without George Harlow.

The New York Times called the exhibition "a dazzling feast for the eye that displays ages of lore, science, industry, adornment and literature about these most precious of precious stones, and does so with great depth and intelligence," and "the genius of the show seems to be its realization that, for a material so valued and so wreathed in superlatives, the only way to achieve a great public exhibition is to be uncompromising at every turn." I particularly enjoyed the reference to the fact that "some displays even have a scientific equation or two in the fine print." In the same article, when asked his favorite specimen of all the great diamonds in the show, George is quoted as replying "a diamond-bearing eclogite" —only a mineralogist! Yes, there were great pieces of jewelry that undoubtedly were a major draw for the

public, but as the quotes suggested the exhibition also was a comprehensive story about diamond the mineral. As such, visitors were provided a glistening glimpse into the sciences of geology, mineralogy, crystallography, and petrology. A friend of mine said after seeing the exhibition: "I didn't really like diamonds very much, until after I saw the exhibit and realized how interesting they are." One indication of a successful exhibit is that visitors should be changed by it. I have no doubt that because of George, and the "Nature of Diamonds" there are many changed people, and perhaps a new generation of budding mineralogists.

Over 400,000 people saw the "Nature of Diamonds" during its 6 month off-Broadway run in New York, and then it was taken on the road, to Tokyo, San Diego, Quebec, and Midland, Michigan where in total it was seen by an additional one million people.

One of the great lasting legacies of the diamond exhibition is the associated book on diamonds, "The Nature of Diamonds," for which George was the editor and major contributor. It has become the definitive reference on the subject for experts and the public alike. Even *Playboy* magazine gave it their endorsement, and how many other mineralogists can claim the same for any of their accomplishments!

In addition to his work on exhibitions, George has made numerous other contributions to the mineralogical community. He served as president of the Society for Mineral Museum Professionals from 1993 to 1996, and in this capacity and through many other activities, he has served as an effective leader and mentor to the museum and amateur mineralogical communities. Of course, in his position as Curator of the Gem and Mineral Collection at the American Museum of Natural History he has provided research support to scientists from around the world. And perhaps in what might become one of his greatest challenges, George today assumes the mantle of secretary of our society.

Throughout his career, George has managed to balance public outreach work with a vigorous research program, including a long-term study of jadeite rock, and more recently of the famous Mogok ruby deposits. In particular, his jade work has sparked considerable public interest; including a front-page story in the New York Times reporting on recent jadeite discoveries in Guatemala by George and his colleagues.

Whether you know him as Diamond George, or as in Burma "Dr. Halo," or in Guatemala as Don Jorge de Haida, it is appropriate that our society express its appreciation to George Harlow for his outstanding efforts to share with the public his, and all of our, fascination with rocks, gems, and minerals.

Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure to introduce the recipient of this year's Distinguished Public Service medal, George Harlow.