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Bob Woodruff of ABC News, recognized as one of the world's leading broadcast journalists, gave a dramatic eyewitness account of activity in Iraq to a New Orleans audience of over 1400 Friday. Woodruff was guest speaker at the Acadian Ambulance Service Paramedic Luncheon, held for the first time in the Crescent City.

The program opened with the Presentation of the Colors and Pledge of Allegiance by the U.S. Coast Guard, followed an invocation by Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

The event was designed to pay tribute to the Paramedic of the Year, Marc Creswell. Creswell was selected by his peers to receive the Dr. Arthur Vidrine Award.

Master of ceremonies for the gathering was Dr. Norman C. Francis, president of Xavier College. Francis, who grew up in the Lafayette neighborhood where Acadian's headquarters are located, graduated from Xavier in 1952, and then returned to his alma mater in 1957 to begin his administrative career as dean of men. Since his appointment as the University's first lay president in 1968, Xavier has more than tripled its enrollment, broadened its curriculum, expanded its campus and received national attention for its award-winning academic initiatives.

Another special guest on the program was Chairman Donald E. Powell, who was named by President Bush as Federal Coordinator of Gulf Coast Rebuilding and charged with developing a long-term rebuilding plan for the region in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma. Powell introduced the featured speaker, describing Woodruff as "symbolic of those special people who take great risks on a regular basis to assure that the United States is strengthened by an informed citizenry." Powell said Woodruff's reports from New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina "helped focus the nation's attention on the massive tragedy here."

Woodruff, Powell noted, has covered major stories throughout the country and around the world. "He has covered the entire so-called 'axis of evil,' the nuclear showdown in Iran, and in June 2005 got unprecedented access to the secretive country of North Korea," Powell said.

In January of 2006, while reporting from Iraq, Woodruff suffered life-threatening injuries from a roadside bomb. Wounds included severe traumatic brain injury, or TBI.

"Bob spent five weeks in a medically induced coma," Powell said, "and when he finally woke up, he was unable to remember even the names of his family members. But in fighting his way back to health, he showed that same level of courage and determination the world had seen in his journalistic endeavors. As he healed, he developed a determination to help shed light on traumatic brain injury. That determination resulted in the creation of the Bob Woodruff Family Fund for Traumatic Brain Injury. The goal of the fund is to raise awareness about TBI, and to raise money to support organizations that help those suffering from TBI to receive the best care possible," Powell concluded.

Woodruff's deeply moving presentation described the rigors of covering war-torn Iraq. He spoke of the dangers and of the rewarding moments when it was possible to give aid to innocent victims of the war.

He also painted a vivid picture of Hurricane Katrina from the unique point of view of a seasoned journalist. He recalled for the audience the ongoing rescue efforts by Acadian Paramedics and other first responders. He had high praise particularly for the medics aboard medically equipped helicopters that carried out the rescue of hundreds of people trapped in hospitals.

The 2007 Paramedic of the Year Award was presented by Dr. Ross Judice, chief medical officer of Acadian Ambulance. A special video presentation depicted recipient Creswell's 17 years of service to Acadian. He began his career as an EMT and worked his way up to paramedic while serving in ground operations in Lafayette. He is now a flight paramedic on Air Med I and serves as the department's flight training officer.

While serving full time with Air Med, he also serves as the ESOP Committee chairman, an instructor at NEMSA, works part time for the communications center and on the ambulance.

Operations Manager Tony Cramer described Creswell as, "A very passionate medic, giving his all and always striving to improve the process in which he treats his patients. He rarely settles for anything less than perfection."

Creswell used the time allotted for his acceptance speech to pay tribute to his fellow medics and describe some of their remarkable accomplishments. He also spoke of the difficulties medics encounter on a daily basis coming to the rescue of those in need. "We are the best part of someone's worst day," he reminded his fellow medics.

Acadian Chairman and CEO Richard Zuschlag expressed his pride in the members of his organization and the role they played in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina's attack on New Orleans. He concluded the afternoon by thanking his Acadian family for their loyalty and dedication that has made thirty-five years of service possible in EMS.

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Photo Outline -

Flight Paramedic Marc Creswell received the Paramedic of the Year Award at the annual Acadian Ambulance Service Paramedic Luncheon, held for the first time in the Crescent City. Bob Woodruff of ABC News, recognized as one the world's leading broadcast journalists, gave a dramatic eyewitness account of activity in Iraq as the featured guest speaker. Pictured from left are Dr. Norman Francis, president of Xavier University, who acted as master of ceremonies, Woodruff, Creswell, Acadian Ambulance Chairman & CEO Richard Zuschlag and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ross Judice.
