

2016 Global Humanitarian Summit in Marietta, Georgia

Myrna Lapres
March 29, 2016



Dance Ministry: Changing the World One Step at a Time

I recently had the privilege of participating in the annual 2016 Global Humanitarian Summit in Marietta, Georgia. In its fifth year, the summit is the brainchild of Dr. Neil Shulman, Associate Professor of Internal Medicine at Emory University School of Medicine. Dr. Shulman or “Doc Hollywood” is a prolific writer and he co-produced the Warner Brothers’ movie “Doc Hollywood” starring Michael J. Fox which was based on his book, “What? Dead Again?” But it is his amazing ability of bringing together people to collaborate, create connection and community that gives the Summit its life.

The Global Humanitarian Summit is a festival, a movement and a gathering that brings together humanitarians from all over the globe to learn, network, share, connect and inspire. The weekend was filled with keynote speeches, in-depth talks, interactive exhibits, workshops, film screenings, education and entertainment. The kaleidoscope of presentations ran the gamut from community-building, to human rights, God-centered leadership, empowerment of women and youth, international and local missions, wellness, laughter, yoga, and so much more.



Dr. Shulman and Dennis Murray

One of the keynote speakers at the Friday evening opening ceremony was Mrs. Naomi Ruther Barber King, the widow of A.D. King, Martin Luther King, Jr.’s younger brother who was also a Baptist minister and civil rights activist. Mrs. King has made it her life’s work to focus on youth and women empowerment and nonviolent social change strategies as a way of life. In her talk, she challenged youth to do five things: live a life to serve others, have a dream, strive to fulfill it, seek a mentor to give guidance, and know God as your creator to help to find your purpose.

Saturday morning began with a bang as a local group, “Seed & Feed Abominable Marching Band,” appeared among the exhibits and joyfully lead us upstairs to the first session of the day. The opening ceremony included a Native American flute performance, a presentation by the Global Humanitarian Summit chairperson, Debbie Ellison, on “Laughter for Wellness” and a recitation of a universal Pledge of Allegiance:

In his welcoming remarks, Dr. Shulman mentioned a number of collaborators for the summit. Dennis S.

Murray, Sr. has been a great supporter and someone Dr. Shulman stated walks the talk. A former professional basketball player, Mr. Murray founded a youth development program thirty years ago that works in five states in the southeast. In spite of having survived three strokes, Mr. Murray is still empowering and strengthening youth through scholarship programs and mentorships. Another, a Clark University professor from Ghana is collaborating with Dr. Shulman to create mobile clinics in Ghana to diagnose diabetes and hypertension. Through Dr. Shulman's connections, a Chinese student at Emory has developed a phone app that gives a list of symptoms for these diseases that can be used to connect people to the mobile clinics.

Dr. Ekaette Heyliger was introduced as a key planning committee member who has worked with Dr. Shulman from the inception of the Global Humanitarian Summit. In addition to planning the summit, Dr. Heyliger was an exhibitor and a speaker. She is the co-chairperson for Women's Federation for World Peace (Georgia), and my friend. She is the one who encouraged me to attend this awesome weekend event.

Held at Emory University for the first four years, many speakers throughout the day praised the decision of the Summit's organizing committee to move the location to a church this year. Everyone seemed to be in agreement that in church is the best place to honor God. One speaker, Dr. Sinclair Grey III (an American Clergy Leadership Conference pastor) challenged participants to help the church to be the voice to speak out against injustices in the world, starting in "my community and my neighborhood."

For me, the Saturday evening session was the highlight. We were treated to a colorful and impactful dance performance by ViZion Dance-a dance ministry whose motto is: Changing the World One Step at a Time. Additionally, Tom Blue Wolf created images in our mind through his telling of the creation story.

We heard from Delores Bunch-Keemer, granddaughter of Cleopatra Jones, unsung Civil Rights leader and community volunteer. Founder of the non-profit, Giving a Hand, Ms. Bunch-Keemer has worked with President Jimmy Carter and with many organizations, helping them get access to needed supplies. She said, "It is simply in my blood to reach out and be active in the community."

Concluding the evening program was a tribute to former President Jimmy Carter. The Summit was dedicated to him. Karin Ryan, Senior Policy Advisor on Human Rights at the Carter Center gave the tribute and spoke of his life work of giving back and empowering others.

All in all, this was an incredible weekend of learning, networking together and being inspired by the diverse array of humanitarian movers and shakers gathered together in one place. In the true spirit of volunteerism, this event is offered free of charge and no speaker, presenter or exhibitor is paid. The keynote events were streamed live around the globe with the hope of inspiring others to help launch a global humanitarian movement.