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North Hempstead Honors Haiti Humanitarian and Westbury WWII Hero

North Hempstead, NY—Supervisor Jon Kaiman members of the Town Council took time before last week's Board meeting to pay tribute to a pair of North Hempstead icons: Former Tuskegee Airman, Lt. Col. Spann Watson of Westbury and Dr. Louis J. Auguste of Great Neck who led a relief mission to Haiti.

“It is often said that the biggest part of getting something accomplished is showing up,” Supervisor Kaiman noted before honoring the Long Island Jewish Medical Center oncologist and the WWII fighter pilot with proclamations. “Thank you for showing up. Because of it, the human community and our immediate community is a much better place because of it.”

Because of the week-long mission Dr. Auguste and his son took to his native Haiti after the 7.1 magnitude earthquake destroyed Port-au-Prince and other parts of the island Jan. 12, dozens of lives and limbs were saved.

Dr. Auguste was among a group of 60 members of the New York Chapter of the Association of Haitian Physicians.

“Gasps were continuous” he wrote in his account of the trip as the group set eyes on the capital city, most of it reduced to rubble and occupied by tent cities, dead bodies under the broiling sun. The group ultimately set up shop at the State University Hospital, which had been evacuated.

There, even as strong aftershocks rattled nerves and remains of buildings, he repaired life-threatening wounds, changed dressings, provided surgical consultations and even helped with a Cesarean section.

“I don't think I did anything out of the ordinary,” Dr. August said after Supervisor Kaiman handed him the proclamation. “It was a natural reaction once you saw the devastation,” he said. “The job is far from done,” he added. “We have to go back.”

Also being honored prior to the Town Board meeting was Lt. Col. Watson, who took onlookers back to a troubling time in America—when the country was opposed to blacks in the military. His parents worked god-awfully hard so he and his two brothers could get an education, he said. He entered Howard University in 1939 where he studied mechanical engineering. He continued his studies at Tuskegee Institute before joining the U.S. Army Air Corps as a flying cadet.

During 24 years as a lead pilot, he became one of a handful of Tuskegee Airmen who fought the German Luftwaffe over the Mediterranean Sea.

“I am an American,” Lt. Col. Watson said proudly clutching his proclamation. “This is my country.”

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Caption: WWII Hero & Westbury Resident Spann Watson (center) was honored by (L to R) Councilman Angelo P. Ferrara, Councilwoman Maria-Christina Poons, Supervisor Jon Kaiman, Councilwoman Viviana L. Russell, Councilwoman Fred Pollack and Councilwoman Lee Seeman.