



2005 Person of the Year: Patrick Awuah

For his selflessness and commitment to improving education standards in Ghana, Patrick Awuah, founder and president of Ashesi University, has been selected as GhanaWeb's Person of the year for 2005.

After living in the United States for nearly 20 years, he moved back to Ghana to start a new university in hopes of educating Africa's next generation of leaders.

On Dec. 17 2005, four years after enrolling its first crop of freshmen, Ashesi issued its first diplomas to a graduating class of 20 students.



Elizabeth Ohene, minister in charge of universities, who attended the graduation ceremony, said Awuah is making a valuable contribution to higher education in the country. "One is very grateful for people like Patrick Awuah who have taken up this challenge, and for what he is doing here," she says. "The old way of the state providing tertiary education for everybody who wants to go is obviously not sustainable."

Patrick Awuah took on a task worthy of a superhero. A product of Achimota Sec School, intelligence and drive got him a scholarship to Pennsylvania's Swarthmore College, where he studied engineering, and was also introduced to the liberal arts.

After graduation in 1985 he landed a job at Microsoft, and in the midst of its epic stock run-up he spoke with Paul Maritz, the boss, "I hate to tell you this, but I don't intend to spend my entire career at Microsoft." This was heresy at Microsoft, but Paul recognized something transcendent in the bright young African, and didn't discourage his notions. Patrick quit Microsoft with a big dream and some cash, but no experience or road map. So he enrolled in the Haas School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley. His master's project: a feasibility study of a private African liberal arts university, which he named Ashesi, meaning "beginning" in Akan, a local Ghanaian dialect.

Then he set out to build such a university from scratch, which he hoped will become the seed for a series of private schools that will educate Africa's future government and business leaders, an African Ivy League. When skeptics balked at the audacity of his vision, he pointed out that Harvard started in 1636 with just nine students in a small home in Boston.

Patrick became so completely committed to Ashesi he re-located his Seattle-born wife and their two small children, son Nanayaw and an infant daughter Efia, to his ancestral home in Ghana. He now devotes full time to the school, which he hopes will be a vehicle to change the trajectory of Africa's economic development, and a means to lead his nation to grace.

Awuah has proved that one does not need to be in government to make a change.

Ashesi University (www.ashesi.org) is a private, non-sectarian institution. It is a subsidiary of Ashesi University Foundation, a non-profit, publicly supported US corporation as described in Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code. Ashesi University admits students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students of the school.

Previous winners of Person of the year

- 1997 Kofi Annan
- 1998 The Ghanaian in Diaspora
- 1999 Kofi Annan (voted by GhanaWeb Visitors)
- 2000 Jerry John Rawlings (voted by GhanaWeb Visitors)
- 2001 The Ghanaian
- 2002 President J. A. Kufuor (voted by GhanaWeb Visitors)
- 2003 Cardinal Peter Appiah Turkson (voted by GhanaWeb Visitors)
- 2004 Dr Kwadwo Afari-Gyan

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