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Courage and Hope

01.29.2007 | Culture and Society, Campus and Community  Paul Rusesabagina, who turned the hotel he managed into a sanctuary and saved more than 1,200 people during the Rwandan genocide in 1994, will round out the University of Dayton's 2006-2007 Diversity Lecture Series at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 20, in the Kennedy Union Ballroom.

Rusesabagina received the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2005, and his heroism inspired the Oscar-nominated movie, "Hotel Rwanda." His 2006 autobiography, "An Ordinary Man," offers an account of how he kept his hotel open "as the nation descended into chaos and 800,000 people were butchered by their friends, neighbors and countrymen."

The talk is free, but tickets are required. Call the Kennedy Union box office at 937-229-2545 or order online here. Organizers recommend that patrons arrive early for seating in the ballroom. A live feed will be available in the Sears Recital Hall and the Science Center Auditorium.

Parking is available in Lots D and S1 across from Holy Angels Church on Brown Street. A book signing and reception will immediately follow the lecture in the Kennedy Union Torch Lounge.

The son of a Hutu father and a Tutsi mother, Rusesabagina became the first Rwandan general manager of the Belgian-owned hotel, Mille Collines. In April 1994 "when the militia and army came with orders to kill my guests," he offered them beer and cognac and spent the next 76 days talking to them. He didn't own a gun.

"Today I am convinced that the only thing that saved those 1,268 people in my hotel were words," he writes in his autobiography with Tom Zoellner. "Not the liquor, not money, not the U.N. Just ordinary words directed against darkness. They are so important. I used words in many ways during the genocide -- to plead, intimidate, coax, cajole and negotiate. I was slippery and evasive when I needed to be. I acted friendly toward despicable people. I put cartons of champagne in their car trunks. I flattered them shamelessly.

"I did whatever I thought it would take to keep the people in my hotel from being killed."

Rusesabagina, his wife, children and the refugees eventually managed to escape to Tanzania. Today, his family lives in Belgium. He has received a number of humanitarian awards, including the National Civil Rights Museum Freedom Award.

The University of Dayton's Diversity Lecture Series -- part of a larger strategic plan to foster inclusion and diversity on campus and prepare students, faculty, staff and the Dayton community for success in a global society -- is co-sponsored by the offices of the president and provost with support from corporate partners, including The National Conference for Community and Justice, Dayton Daily News, WDTN-TV, WDAO-1210 AM and Markey's Audio Visual.

Contact Lynnette Heard, executive director of the president's office, at 937-229-4122.