(Mesdames et Messieurs les élus)

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Chers ami(e)s,

Permettez-moi une brève introduction en français pour vous faire part de notre joie d'être ici aujourd'hui en votre belle ville de Toulouse, dans ce magnifique salon.

Je souhaite remercier particulièrement la Mairie de Toulouse, Monsieur le Maire, Jean-Luc Moudenc et son équipe, pour leur bon accueil, ainsi que les membres du Comité de jumelage Toulouse-Atlanta pour leur amitié fidèle et leur hospitalité chaleureuse.

C'est un plaisir  de vous retrouver tous et toutes à l'occasion de célébrations officielles comme celle-ci.

Comme j’ai peur de ne pas pouvoir m’exprimer correctement dans votre belle langue, permettez-moi donc de profiter de l'aide d'une traductrice.

Merci de votre comprehension.

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

I want to say that the Atlanta Toulouse Sister City Committee gave the statue to Toulouse with all of the cooperation and hard work from many of our 100 members. But it was totally John Lyons who was the leader and inspiration for this effort.

I have been involved with the sister city committee for about 14 years. During those years, I have been asked many times, “Why is Toulouse a Sister City with Atlanta?” Let me answer that question…..it’s a love story, and it involves 3 generations.

Irene Dobbs was a member of a prominent Atlanta African- American family. She graduated with honors from Spellman College in Atlanta, majoring in French. She came to Toulouse from 1931-1933 and received her Master’s degree from the University of Toulouse, which was a very unusual thing for a young black woman to be doing in 1933.

She had been corresponding with her boyfriend, Maynard Jackson, SR. in Atlanta, and she told him she wanted to stay in Toulouse to work on her PhD. But he was afraid he would lose her if she stayed that long in France.

So he bought a car and drove to New York. He took a boat to France. He came to Toulouse and courted Irene and proposed to her.

They were married here in City Hall in June of 1933 in the Salle du Mariage and Mayor Pierre Boudis presided at the wedding. They honeymooned on the French Riviera and in Italy.

They returned to the United States of America and had four children. He became the pastor of Friendship Baptist Church.

Maynard Jackson, Jr. was 15 when his father died. Afterwards, his grandfather Dobbs guided his upbringing. Maynard was a very charismatic and intelligent young man. He graduated from high school at 14 and graduated from Morehouse University at 18.

Maynard Jr. was in Boston going to school and working when his mother returned to Toulouse with her 3 younger children, 14, 9 and 6. They were here from 1956-1958. She received her Doctoral es Lettres with honors (avec mention) and they returned to Atlanta.

Maynard got his law degree and worked at various jobs. At age 30 he got involved in politics. At age 35 he became the first black mayor of Atlanta. He said, “I am the youngest, the fattest and the blackest mayor Atlanta ever had.

While he was mayor, Atlanta decided to develop some sister city relationships. Maynard thought Toulouse would be an ideal Sister for Atlanta. And it has been.

In 1993 Valerie and Maynard Jackson were taking a trip with the Atlanta Toulouse Sister City Committee, in the Dordogne. While they were on the bus, they decided to be re-married. This re-commitment ceremony was 60 years after his parents were married here, and it took place in the same room, presided over by Mayor Dominique Baudis, son of the former mayor.

Maynard passed away in 2002. In 2004 Valerie returned with us and their two daughters, Valerie-Amanda and Alexandria to Toulouse. This was the trip where the Phoenix statue was presented. It was a bittersweet trip for her, but it was a good trip.

Later, their first born, Valerie-Amanda, fluent in French, became engaged in the same room in City Hall. She was surprised by her boyfriend, with assistance of the mayor’s office, and the Toulouse Atlanta committee, which made every attempt to recreate the atmosphere of love produced by two earlier generations. Residency requirements did not allow them to be married in France, so they returned to Atlanta and were married in City Hall by Mayor Andrew Young.

So Toulouse is forever dear to the Jackson family, representing 3 generations of committed love and a symbol of the quest for higher education of the Dobbs/Jackson family.

Valerie was sorry she could not be with us today; she is traveling with her daughter Alexandria. She sends her deepest regrets.

Atlanta has 18 Sister Cities, but our group is one of the most active, and we have the best love story.