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President Bush recognizes OU student

By **Mary E. Iorio**, OU Writer

With fall leaves wafting through the air and Air Force One behind him, President George W. Bush recognized the extraordinary efforts of OU student and AmeriCorps volunteer Lenwood Compton during a fly-in for a Republican rally at the Oakland County International Airport on Oct. 14.

In a speech that covered everything from judicial nominations to recent port closures on the West Coast to his thoughts on homeland security, Bush took time to address the importance of volunteerism in showing the world the true heart of Americans. "There are things government can do to make America a better place, but not nearly as importantly as what our fellow Americans can do to make America a better place. Government can hand out money, but what government cannot do is put hope in people's hearts or a sense of purpose in people's lives. That's up to our fellow Americans," Bush said.

Pausing to identify Compton on the stage with him, the president drew attention to the work of the junior elementary education major from Pontiac. Compton is completing his second year as an AmeriCorps volunteer, serving 15 hours each week as a reading and writing tutor and developing lesson plans and curricula for summer camps and after-school activities through the Pontiac Area Transitional Housing (PATH) program.

"Today we've got with us Lenny Compton...He mentors a child. He mentors kids in the first, second and third grade. He understands one person can't do everything to change America, but one person can do something. One person can help change America, one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time. I want to thank you, Lenny."

The rally marked the second time in four months that President Bush has visited with Oakland University students. He came to the Rochester campus in July, along with Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski, to speak about freedom and the war against terrorism.

On Oct. 14, Compton had the opportunity to shake hands with the president and speak with him for several minutes. "He asked me about my education. I told him that I was still in school at OU and I was planning to be a teacher. He said that he'd read a lot about my experiences and he was pleased with the work I was doing. I said 'Well, I'm pleased with the work you're doing, too.' He laughed and said, 'Your work is more important, because you are out there touching lives.' "

In addition to a contingent of Oakland University AmeriCorps members on hand to support Compton, his entire family and his pastor attended the event. His brother flew in from Chicago and a cousin came all the way from California to cheer for him.

"Lenny epitomizes the spirit of community action, civic responsibility and excellent leadership that President Bush has set as a goal for all Americans," said Carol Anne Ketelsen, AmeriCorps Oakland program director. "His outstanding service to his community and to children is an ideal we can all strive to emulate."

OU's AmeriCorps volunteers completed more than 80 community service projects last year, from giving up Saturday mornings to 'paint the town' to raising money for the family of a 9-11 victim to participating in Make a Difference Day.

The honor of serving as an official Freedom Corps greeter gave Compton and his family insight into the workings of the Secret Service and Air Force One.

"We were in line to get into the event, and when the Secret Service realized we were part of the program about 12 agents came over to usher my family ahead of everyone else," Compton said. "It was incredible to see all the behind-the-scenes action. The Secret Service cleared the skies before the president's plane could touch down. I got to talk with the person in charge of Air Force One."

Compton also rubbed elbows with Republican gubernatorial candidate Dick Posthumus, former U.S. Senator from Michigan and now cabinet member Spencer Abraham, Congressman Joe Knollenberg, R-Michigan, and congressional candidates Thaddeus McCotter and Candice Miller.

Compton completes his volunteer work on top of a 16-credit class load. He hopes to teach middle school math upon graduation.

"I think it's a critical age," he said. "These students are developing, and they need concerned and qualified teachers who can steer them in the right direction."

SUMMARY

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