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OU senior honored for community service

By **Dawn Pauli**, contributing writer

Even as a little girl, Crystal Wilkerson always knew she would make a career out of helping others.

"I wanted to be a firefighter, then a policewoman, then a teacher, each time knowing that these people helped others, and that was what I wanted to do," she said.

As a senior in OU's elementary education program, Wilkerson has set her sights on becoming a teacher to make a difference in the lives of young children. However, her career of helping others is already under way.

Wilkerson's unwavering devotion to community service was recognized in front of 300 people at the Fifth Annual Hometown Heroes of Oakland County Volunteer Awards Luncheon. She won in the Young Adult category.

"Winning the Hometown Hero Award was a great honor, and I feel very fortunate to have been selected. It is nice to know others recognize and appreciate the services I have provided," she said. "I am committed to volunteering because I believe that I am very fortunate in the things that I have and feel that it is important to give of my time and talents to those who do not have the same things that I do."

Over a two-year period, as a member of AmeriCorps Oakland, Wilkerson volunteered 1,800 hours tutoring and mentoring children, supervising extracurricular activities and working at OU campus events.

Highlights of her many activities include organizing a bowl-a-thon to raise money for the Oakland and Livingston Service Agency's infant/child division, Make A Difference Day, UNICEF fund-raiser, Golden Key Friday Fun Nights, and the Empty Bowls Charity fund-raiser.

"I am totally impressed and amazed at her ability to give of herself so selflessly to help others locally and globally," said Jean Ann Miller, director of the Center for Student Activities, who nominated Wilkerson for the award. "This recognition is well deserved. And she's a sweetheart on top of it."

Last summer, Wilkerson went to Ghana, West Africa, for eight weeks to work with Operations Crossroads, a women's development organization. She's also a member of Golden Key International Honour Society, serving as an elected official on the executive board as vice president of America's Promise.

"This is the just the icing on the cake," said Miller as she read through a four-page list of community service projects Wilkerson has worked on as an OU student.

As a testament to her dedication, Wilkerson also was honored with the Commuter Involvement and Voluntary Service Awards this year.

Although her efforts have earned her accolades, Wilkerson doesn't volunteer for recognition and awards. When asked about receiving the Hometown Hero Award, she was just as excited for the other winners. "It was also nice to learn of and honor of all the others in our area who have also given their time to help others."

Wilkerson is working as a summer camp teacher for at-risk children who are part of the Pontiac Area Transitional Housing program. She also is an office assistant for the AmeriCorps Oakland program.

Even when she's taking classes and working, Wilkerson volunteers an average of five hours a week. As an AmeriCorps member, she volunteered 20 hours per week.

Wilkerson credits her parents who taught her to "give myself to others whenever possible."

She also remembers a middle school teacher who introduced her to volunteering in her community on a regular basis. At OU, Miller has played an important role in her life.

"I would like to thank Jean Ann Miller for all of her hard work and dedication to volunteering on campus and in our community and for the friendship I have shared with her throughout my years at Oakland," Wilkerson said.

The HomeTown Hero awards are sponsored by The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Oakland University, St. Joseph Mercy of Oakland, Assistance League of South East Michigan, Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency, Junior League of Birmingham Inc., Chisholm, Shuttie and Wilson Law Firm, and Bloomfield Hills Public Schools. The sponsors are involved in the planning and judging of the awards.

SUMMARY

Crystal Wilkerson, a senior in OU's elementary education program, recently was recognized in front of 300 people at the Fifth Annual Hometown Heroes of Oakland County Volunteer Awards Luncheon for her unwavering devotion to community service.

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