



Wednesday, December 8, 2004

Former actress to receive honorary degree at age 101

By **Rebecca Wyatt**, *OU Web Writer*

At the age of 101, Doris Eaton Travis will receive an honorary doctorate of humanities from Oakland University during the fall commencement ceremonies Saturday, Dec. 18, in recognition of her accomplishments and service within the scope of the arts, sciences, professions and public service.

Travis and her late husband, Paul, established the Doris and Paul Travis Professor Program, which rewards one OU faculty member from the Music, Theatre and Dance Department and Art and Art History Department for outstanding accomplishments in teaching, research and/or professional services with an annual salary supplement of \$5,000 and a faculty development fund of \$1,700.

The Travis' were social friends of OU founders Alfred and Matilda Wilson, and they frequently visited **Meadow Brook Hall** during their years living in Michigan.

As an actress and dancer, Travis began performing with the Ziegfeld Follies at the age of 14. She appeared with Will Rogers, Eddie Canton, W.C. Fields and Fannie Brice in various productions during her career. In 1929, the song "Singin' in the Rain" was written for her to sing in a special dance number at the Hollywood Music Box Review. While Gene Kelly made the song famous, she introduced it.

During the Great Depression, she was a dance teacher at the Arthur Murray Studio of Social Dance and later became owner of a chain of 18 Arthur Murray Dance Studios in Michigan, which she operated for 30 years.

Travis traded the dance studio business to start another business. She and her husband moved to Oklahoma and founded the Travis Ranch Nursing Home for Horses, which was a center for horse breeding and racing. After her husband's death, she continued to run the ranch, which is now used for boarding rather than breeding.

At age 76, she attended the University of Oklahoma, and in 1992 at age 88, she graduated with a degree in history as the oldest graduate in the university's history. She currently is pursuing a master's degree in liberal studies.

Travis still performs annually at benefit events on Broadway. She credits her longevity to taking no medication, following no special diet and getting exercise by walking around her house.

She completed her memoirs, "The Days We Danced," in 2003, which she will be autographing during an invitation-only book-signing event at OU on Friday, Dec. 17.

Her story has gained national attention from CNN, The New York Times, National Public Radio, "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno" and "The Rosie O'Donnell Show."

"The committee has recommended that Doris Eaton Travis be awarded an honorary degree at Oakland University in recognition of her extraordinary accomplishments in the performing arts, in business and as an author. The qualities she has exhibited and the accomplishments she has achieved over a very long life are exemplary and inspiring," said Ronald Sudol, associate provost of academic affairs and chair of the honorary degree committee.

Travis will be presented with her honorary degree during the **College of Arts and Sciences** commencement ceremony at 5 p.m. Dec. 18.

For more information on commencement ceremonies, visit the **Oakland University Commencement** Web site.

SUMMARY

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