



Tuesday, December 4, 2001

OU honors local heroes

By *Jennifer Charney*, OU Staff Writer

As soon as Auburn Hills police officer Rick Leonard II heard about the Sept. 11 World Trade Center attacks, he said he wanted to turn on his red and blue lights and drive to New York to help. By 11 p.m. that night, he and fellow Oakland County law enforcement officers were on their way.

Leonard was among officers that Oakland University's **Center for Student Activities** honored at its Monday, Dec. 3, "Tribute to the Heroes." The event recognized the efforts of 26 Oakland County police and fire personnel who assisted in the Sept. 11 recovery efforts at the former site of the World Trade Center, known as Ground Zero.

Leonard, son of former OU police chief Dick Leonard and an OU alumnus who graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in sociology in March 2001, volunteered to join other officers from the Oakland County Sheriff's Department, Royal Oak and Lake Angelus, who caravanned with other metro Detroit officers to New York.

"We ended up doing whatever anybody needed us to do," Leonard said. "We ended up spending most of our time in the bucket lines at Ground Zero, removing debris."

He said the unity at the scene impressed him the most.

"It was just amazing. There was an army of officers and firemen down there working — and there was this whole other army of people trying to help. You couldn't go 10 feet without somebody offering water or a sandwich or asking if we wanted our eyes rinsed out," Leonard said.

The most rewarding moment, Leonard recalls, was when the New York City officers asked him where he came from. "I said, 'Auburn Hills, Michigan.' They would stop and give me a big hug and say, 'Thanks for coming — you have no idea how much it means to us.'"

The tribute, which drew more than 60 people in the Oakland Center's Fireside Lounge, featured singing by Ann MacDonald, an OU junior majoring in musical theater; a slide show of the World Trade Center rescue efforts by Paul Franklin, coordinator of campus programs for the Center for Student Activities; a presentation of certificates by Franklin and Derek Dickow, student body president; and remarks by Damon Shields, captain with the Oakland County Sheriff's Department, and Neal Shine, OU professor in the Department of Rhetoric, Communication and Journalism.

"Today we stand once again among heroes," Shine said. "We will speak of our national response to the cataclysm of September 11. We'll call it the spirit of New York, the spirit of America, when what it really is is the spirit of our own humanity, of our own compassion, of the love we have for each other."

"We are sustained not by terrorism alone, but by the strength and spirit of that humanity. A humanity, which, as it always has, requires us to do what must be done, to give what must be given, to share what must be shared. It is within this humanity that heroism truly lies. It is this humanity that gives us heroes. It is this humanity we honor in those with us this afternoon. Today, these people will graciously accept our thanks for what they have done for us and for their country."

Shields thanked Oakland University for the tribute.

"It's very gratifying," he said. "I think most of the officers who went to New York would say that we're not heroes; we did what we do every day."

Shields said he and his colleagues have been asked many times what it was like in New York. "The magnitude (at Ground Zero) is the thing that you can't describe," he said. "The actual site was absolutely devastating. To think that two great representative structures of our country were just gone — they disappeared. To see the faces of the firefighters who just would not give up. To see the faces of men who had worked tirelessly for 24, 36, 48 hours, was heart wrenching."

"One of the reasons we went was that we're used to responding to calls for help from agencies around us. The residents and

people there were just incredible. It was one country, one people, all pulling for the same thing.”

SUMMARY

As soon as Auburn Hills police officer Rick Leonard II heard about the Sept. 11 World Trade Center attacks, he wanted to turn on his red and blue lights and drive to New York to help. That night, he and fellow law enforcement officers were on their way. Leonard was among of 26 Oakland County police and fire personnel that Oakland University's Center for Student Activities honored at its Monday, Dec. 3, "Tribute to the Heroes."

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