

Thursday, January 3, 2008

Six OU students to receive Keeper of the Dream scholarships

By **Susan Thwing-McHale**, staff writer

Six Oakland University students will be honored at the 16th annual Keeper of the Dream Awards Celebration on Monday, Jan. 21 at 11:30 a.m. in the Oakland Center Banquet Rooms. The Keeper of the Dream Awards pay tribute to the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for his achievements on behalf of civil rights. Human rights activist and entertainer Harry Belafonte will be the keynote speaker of the event, which recognizes students for their efforts to break down cultural stereotypes and promote interracial understanding.

In addition to contributing to interracial understanding and good will, award recipients must demonstrate academic achievement, a clear career focus and academic persistence.

With support from companies and community leaders, students receive scholarships for their citizenship and leadership efforts. This year's scholarship sponsors are: the Alice Gustafson Endowment Fund, the Keeper of the Dream Foundation, LaSalle Bank, William Beaumont Hospitals, Oakland University Alumni Association, and the Ford Motor Company Fund.

Recipients for 2008 are: Jinae Stoudemire, a junior pre-med/biology major; Yakela Roberson, a medical laboratory science major; Latonia Garrett, a journalism major; Avery Neale, a pre-med/biology major; Denise Jones, a psychology/pre-law major; and Ronee Harvey, a medical laboratory science major.

"These students exemplify the attitude we all must exhibit in order to keep Dr. King's dream alive," says Omar Brown-El, director, Center for Multicultural Initiatives. "They are extraordinary students and we expect great things from them as they enter the workplace and our communities."

Yakela Roberson **Alice Gustafson Endowment Fund** **Keeper of the Dream Award**

To Yakela Roberson, diversity is more than just being able to communicate with people from different cultures — it's being able to understand and appreciate their motivations and to interact effectively with them.

"The common misinterpretation is that people automatically experience diversity, but in actuality we have to have the willingness to gain knowledge of its true meaning," Yakela says.

Coming from a background where she experienced little diversity, Yakela made a point to expand her own awareness. Her first step was to strengthen her interracial appreciation by joining Hamlin Hall Council. While there, she was able to facilitate programs to influence her peers to embrace other ethnicities. She says the positive experience and feedback she received inspired her to explore more ways to encourage diversity.

Yakela was instrumental in creating the "Walk to Remember" exhibit at East Vandenberg Hall. She spent hours on the project, researching the civil rights movement and facilitating the construction of a showcase. Says Vandenberg Hall Director Katie Miller, "Yakela empowered residents to get involved and actively participate in the engineering and execution of the project, helping them to not only learn more but to also pass their learning on to others through art and interaction."

Yakela is a mentor with Oakland University's Pre-College Programs, where she inspires students of many ethnic backgrounds to pursue higher education. She counsels traditionally under-represented students, conducting programs that highlight career exploration. In this mentorship role, she also participates in social and recreational activities that promote social awareness.

In addition, she has worked with Project Upward Bound College Prep Academy. Social, academic and cultural enrichment are essential focal points to this program, she says. Similarly, as a Resident Assistant, Yakela advises and counsels students in academic, personal and social matters. She plans and facilitates programs that promote academic, social and personal well-being.

A third-year student, Yakela is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Medical Laboratory Science. She is involved with the Circle of Sisterhood and participated in the Diversity Leadership Weekend in 2006.

Jinae Stoudemire **Keeper of the Dream Foundation** **Keeper of the Dream Award**

Jinae Stoudemire is chairperson of the Vandenberg House Council, a Center for Multicultural Initiatives peer mentor and a resident assistant. In each of these roles she is making significant contributions to raising awareness of issues related to diversity and to the improvement of race relations at Oakland University.

As chairperson of the Vandenberg House Council, Jinae spearheaded "Carnival for Change," a fundraiser for Darfur. She was also instrumental in creating the Hall of Oppression, an event designed to help participants understand the dynamics of discrimination and discover ways to change those dynamics.

Jinae is a mentor at the Center for Multicultural Initiatives, assisting students in finding ways to succeed academically. She advises incoming students from many cultures on success skills for college, and in life. "I encourage my mentees to go outside of their comfort zones and reach out to other ethnicities," she said.

As a resident assistant in University Housing, her goal is to bring together many ethnic groups through community events, conversation and understanding. Jinae develops and executes programs related to racism, discrimination and sexual preference. These have



Harry Belafonte will be the keynote speaker at the 2008 Keeper of the Dream Scholarship Awards Celebration on Jan. 21.

included an event which paired residents of different races in a conversation session designed to increase interracial understanding. She encouraged students to ask questions that expanded their knowledge of different cultures. Her dream is to build a bridge between races that will benefit everyone.

"What I've come to find is that no matter how a person looks or their ethnic background, that it is the person who needs understanding," Jinæe wrote in her award application. "As soon as we stop looking at racial things, and just look at people as people, the world will be a lot happier."

Jinæe is a third-year student at Oakland University studying pre-med/biology.

Katie Miller, Vandenberg Hall Director, says, "Jinæe has not only role modeled good scholarship and serving the community; she has actively engaged other residents in these endeavors as well. She has always gone above and beyond...she is responsible, driven and will achieve anything she sets her mind to."

Latonia Garrett
LaSalle Bank
Keeper of the Dream Award

Latonia Garret works hard to make fellow students, regardless of their racial background, comfortable with each other. She once invited a friend, who is Macedonian, to attend an event hosted by the Association of Black Students. When the friend was apprehensive, and wondered if she would be accepted, Latonia encouraged her to attend.

"Inviting my friends to interact with different backgrounds usually leads to a conversation or even friendship, thus promoting racial understanding," she says.

Latonia is an Honor's College junior, majoring in journalism. As a peer mentor in the Center for Multicultural Initiatives, she helps underrepresented students succeed socially and academically. She plans events that promote multicultural understanding. She creates this same opportunity for learning about other cultures as a resident assistant, planning programs to educate residents about the importance of an interracial community, diversity and understanding.

"She has a genuine concern for her residents, and pushes and promotes academics and involvement," explains Aniesha Mitchell, retention coordinator, Academic Skills Center. "Latonia is a friendly person who appreciates and values the difference in others. Each day she breaks stereotypes by her accomplishments, intellect and her fair treatment of others."

"I feel that the best way to make a positive influence is to lead by example," Latonia explains in her application essay. "I have realized that (many) of my closest friends are outside of my race. So, when OU's community sees me having lunch, studying or just having a good time with people outside of my race, I think that it's noticed . . . it might help to make them more open and comfortable with the idea of meeting people outside of their racial background."

Latonia is a member of the Association of Black Students. She is also a member of the Circle of Sisterhood.

Avery Neale
William Beaumont Hospitals
Keeper of the Dream Award

Citizenship, leadership, scholarship: All of these words describe Avery Neale's contributions to Oakland University.

Avery is a mentor. She's worked with the Gear Up and KCP College Day programs, helping minority and at-risk students in grades 7-12 learn about college and financial aid. In addition she has tutored students at Pontiac Northern and Central high schools, and was involved in "Bridge to Life" with OU's business club, Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE).

Avery also serves as a mentor to her peers as an active member of the Honors College, and as a resident assistant at Hamlin Hall. There she presents programs encouraging diversity and the acceptance of other religions, sexual orientations and races. She coordinates open discussions, movies and other programs to unite students.

"Most of all, I impacted students by showing them that people really do care, and if they set their mind upon a dream, nothing can stand in their way," she says.

Environmentally-focused, Avery founded a successful campus-wide recycling program and is president of the OU Environmental Coalition; a group of students and organizations who share the goal of improving OU's environmental through education, recycling, waste reduction and energy efficiency.

A biology and pre-med student, after attending medical school Avery wants to work to create changes in the American health care system and assist people in urban environments. She also plans to use her certification in linguistics and Spanish to help minorities with language barriers.

In addition, Avery deejays a campus radio show where she features guests with diverse backgrounds and opinions as well as a variety of music styles.

"Avery is an exemplary student who excels in the classroom, has created an enriching college experience for herself and has made contributing to the campus a priority," said Kim Shultz, director, Advising Resource Center. "She has a gift for bringing people together and continually encourages her fellow students to actively participate in campus life."

Denise Jones
Oakland University Alumni Association
Keeper of the Dream Award

Denise Jones is a motivated psychology major who works hard to break down cultural stereotypes while participating in a diverse array of activities.

"I strongly promote acceptance within every organization and commitment I have on campus," Denise says. "All students are here with one common goal: to obtain an education. There is no need for unnecessary obstacles such as cultural ignorance to hinder us from reaching this goal."

Denise is a peer mentor at the Center for Multicultural Initiatives (CMI), where she works with at-risk and scholarship students and volunteers at events. As the scholarship chairperson for the Association of Black Students, Denise helps develop scholarship opportunities and assists other OU students through the financial aid process. In addition, she is vice president of the Sociology Club,

where she coordinates discussions focusing on social change and racial groups.

"My role as a mentor has exposed me to some of the most talented and diverse students on campus, and because of them, I learn something new every day," she says.

Denise has earned an Oakland University Trustee Academic Success Scholarship and a Wade McCree Incentive Scholarship.

An active campus volunteer, Denise works with the Environmental Coalition, Project Upward Bound, Residence House Council, Residence Hall Carnival for Change, and the Hall of Oppression.

As CMI graduate intern Sheila Brooks says, "Denise unselfishly gives back to the campus community and is a friends, mentor and role model for myself and others on campus."

Ronee' Harvey
Ford Motor Company Fund
Keeper of the Dream Award

As an active leader on campus, Ronee' Harvey works with Oakland University's diverse student body, sharing her time and talents to help other students succeed. Ronee' is a medical laboratory science major with plans for a career in medicine.

"Ronee's dedication to the students of Oakland is second to none. Her impact on the Oakland University community is visible and her intentions are sincere and from the heart. She is an exemplary student," says Beth DeVerna, tutor/supplemental instruction coordinator, Academic Skills Center.

As a Transitions Program peer mentor, Ronee' supports and works with students with cognitive disabilities to ensure they have a rewarding college experience. She meets with one or two students on a bi-weekly basis, and attends lectures held on campus.

Ronee' works tirelessly to organize monthly meetings and speakers, and coordinate community service activities as the treasurer of the Golden Key Student Organization. Her involvement has given her the opportunity to interact with Oakland University students from very diverse backgrounds. Ronee' was also a Jump Start! student leader, where she introduced freshmen students to available resources on campus and helped develop their leadership skills.

A popular peer tutor at the Academic Skills Center, Ronee' assists students with math, biology, chemistry and Spanish. "Each and every student she has helped has been treated with respect, caring and dignity," says DeVerna. "Her non-judgmental demeanor and eagerness to help quickly boosts their confidence and helps them be successful."

Ronee' says, "I hope to encourage others to step away from what they are accustomed to and realize that it is beneficial to associate with those whose lives vary from our own. There is no reason for one to be afraid of others or develop prejudices toward people because they are different."

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