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OU students awarded Keeper of the Dream scholarships

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

Four Oakland University students were honored at the 17th annual Keeper of the Dream Awards Celebration on Monday, Jan. 19. The Keeper of the Dream Award pays tribute to the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for his achievements on behalf of civil rights. Human rights activist and actor Danny Glover was the keynote speaker at the event, which drew more than 300 people.

The Keeper of the Dream Award recognizes students for their efforts to break down cultural stereotypes and promote interracial understanding.

"I was moved by the moment as I came into this room and saw so many of you here to celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr." Glover said. "I am also pleased to congratulate the four students we are honoring here today as you move from being students into public life. May you continue your good work."

Glover also told the students and the audience that their work was just beginning. "As we celebrate the election of this brilliant young man, Barack Obama, King would say to look at it as only an event ... it is still on us to continue, as people, toward finding a new moral level and implement concrete change," he said.

With support from companies and community leaders, KOD recipients receive scholarships for their citizenship and leadership efforts. In addition to contributing to interracial understanding and good will, award recipients must demonstrate academic achievement, a clear career focus and academic persistence.

Recipients of the 2009 scholarships and their sponsors this year include Lisa Daily, William Beaumont Hospitals; Jasmine Rudolph, the Oakland University Alumni Association; Relando Thompkins, Keeper of the Dream Foundation; and Norris Chase, Ford Motor Company Fund.

"These students exemplify the attitude we all must exhibit in order to keep Dr. King's dream alive," said 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."

Lisa Daily

When Lisa Daily first arrived on OU's campus she described her experience as "complete culture shock." Having grown up in the small community of Kingston, Mich., Daily said, "I was an all-American country girl coming to the 'city' and there were many different people with different cultures, heritages, ethnicities, views and opinions. I quickly learned to adjust and become more open-minded in my actions, beliefs, opinions and words."

Anticipating graduating from the School of Nursing in 2011, Daily is now a visible leader on campus through numerous activities. As a Vandenberg Hall resident assistant, she successfully works with a diverse staff and student population.

"It was an opportunity for me to try to help (residents) break through different racial barriers," she said. "I accomplished this by leading community service efforts directed toward Darfur refugees and providing education about gender stereotypes and the different issues surrounding racial stereotyping."

As part of an "alternative to spring break trip," Daily traveled to New York City with 15 other Oakland University students to work in homeless shelters, food banks and soup kitchens. She also has volunteered at Troy Beaumont Hospital and Crittenton Hospital Medical Center.

Daily was involved in PROJECT 50, where she worked with her residential hall floor and house council to create an exhibit about equity in health care.

Katie Vitale, director of Vandenberg Hall, said, "She worked with students to facilitate the construction of their powerful showcase. She also empowered residents to get involved and actively participate in the engineering and execution of the project, helping them to not only learn more but also to pass their learning on to others through art and interaction."

Daily said her experiences have been rewarding. "By empowering others I have traveled with them in growth and development. We have learned from and taught each other, and in doing so, through support and guidance, have witnessed the disappearance of any prejudices we might have had."

Jasmine Rudolph

Jasmine Rudolph's desire to improve interracial understanding and better herself have been evident in her academic and social activities at Oakland University.

Rudolph, who is pursuing a bachelor of science degree in both nursing and engineering biology with expected graduation in 2010, has served as a resident assistant, publicity committee member for the Association of Black Students, a mentor for GEAR UP pre-college programs and as co-founder of R.E.D.C.O.W. (Revive Experience Dream Change Our World).

"Being a resident assistant allowed me to gain a personal relationship with many students of various races and cultures," she said. "Much like my position in the GEAR UP program, these relationships gave me the foundation to effectively encourage racial awareness and acceptance."

Rudolph also was an on-air personality for the campus station WXOU 88.3FM's program "No Chaser." Through this program, she created an open forum for the student body to discuss societal issues.

"I felt the students of OU could truly benefit from a show designed to give them an opportunity to freely express their opinions in an informal



In back from left, Oakland University students Relando Thompkins, Norris Chase, Lisa Daily and Jasmine Rudolph were named recipients of Keeper of the Dream Awards. Standing in front at center is Bridget Green, assistant director of OU's Center for Multicultural Initiatives.



Actor, producer and human rights activist Danny Glover delivers the keynote address during the 17th Annual Keeper of the Dream Awards Celebration.

atmosphere," she said.

"Every topic challenges me to attack commonly used stereotypes and misconceptions. My intentions are to help people recognize them and work to constructively counteract them. I firmly believe it is meaningless to complain of a situation when you are doing nothing to improve it."

Sarah Mullin, academic advisor for the School of Nursing, was impressed with Rudolph's founding of R.E.D.C.O.W. "She wanted to start this organization to break down barriers and bring unity to groups on campus," Mullin said. "Her enthusiasm and dream are truly contagious."

Relando Thompkins

Relando Thompkins is dedicated to promoting understanding and tolerance. He said, "I long to find a way to improve the human condition, and I intend to gain more wisdom and skills to carry out that goal."

Thompkins, who is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Social Work at Oakland University, is an active student in the university community, participating in many associations, serving on committees and interning at Oakland County's Children's Village. As a mentor for the GEAR UP program, he helped provide academic, social and cultural enrichment programs for pre-college students.

"Relando made outstanding contributions to the program, as well as demonstrated excellent leadership skills relative to the program mission – which is to help under-represented students discover the potential of a college education," said Reginald McCloud, director of the Department of PreCollege Programs.

Thompkins has also served as a resident assistant, an historian of the Association of Black Students, and a Peer Mentor for the Center for Multicultural Initiatives.

"(Relando) is a role model for all, through his community service, school involvement and passion for cultural development," said Jinae Stoudemire, a former KOD recipient and apartment community assistant in the Department of University Housing. "He is someone who not only talks about bringing diverse groups together but actually works toward that goal."

Thompkins said his OU education and experience is preparing him to achieve his goals.

"The wealth of knowledge and experience I have gained from my time spent at Oakland has inspired me to pursue a career in academia; to make a living through educating myself and others on issues involving race relations as well as additional complex problems that put a strain on the unity of humanity," he said. "In doing so, not only will I be able to inspire those in my community, but I will have a platform to reach others on a much grander scale."

Norris Chase

Norris Chase has devoted his time as an Oakland University student to eradicating his own "cultural unawareness." Coming from an environment that offered minimal diversity, Chase said it was important to him to "recognize, accept and further educate myself on interracial differences."

Chase quickly joined Hamlin Hall's Council, serving as an events coordinator during his freshman year. He later became a student peer mentor for Project Upward Bound's Summer Academy, Pre-College Programs and the Center for Multicultural Initiatives.

"This allowed me to build individual relationships with students, of many backgrounds, and gain an even better understanding of distinct cultures," he said.

"This also allowed me to influence others to step outside of their comfort zones and experience new things, such as getting involved in activities they would not normally partake in, becoming acquainted with different types of people and learning more about themselves."

Kasaundra Tomlin, associate professor of economics at Oakland, believes Chase's dedication to interracial understanding is making a difference.

"Norris is a peer mentor, which exemplifies his commitment to breaking down cultural barriers and stereotypes. Providing mentoring to young students galvanizes their interest in attending college, and thereby increases enrollment among disadvantaged students who may not have otherwise chose college after high school," Tomlin said.

Chase is also a co-founder of R.E.D.C.O.W. (Revive Experience Dream Change Our World), an organization that provides networking activities, integration in college and community opportunities, and academic resources.

Chase is pursuing a bachelor's degree in business management.

SUMMARY

More than 300 people gathered to honor the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., congratulate four ambitious and civically-minded students, and hear a keynote address by actor, producer and human rights activist Danny Glover.

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