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OU alumni named to Crains '20 in their 20s'

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

Many 20-somethings leaving college set out to find a job, define themselves, get their own apartments and enter into a serious relationship. "Crain's Detroit Business" identified 20 local 20-somethings who are excelling at what they do. Two of the "20 in their 20s" on the list are OU alumni. David Cherry, a program development officer at The Guidance Center in Southgate, and Sarah Morgan, executive director of Think Girl, made the list of those in their 20s making their mark on Metro Detroit.

David Cherry

As an OU undergraduate, Cherry had no idea that he would eventually be grant writing for a non-profit or be recognized for his ability to raise millions for Detroit-area organizations.

As a history and political science major at OU, Cherry was introduced to City Connect Detroit by his sister, who mentioned their cause to him. He went on the City Connect Detroit Web site, located the e-mail address of a staff member and sent them a note. They wrote him back asking for a writing sample, brought him in for an interview and hired him for an internship.

After being hired by City Connect Detroit, writing more than \$3 million in successful grant requests and learning the ropes of grant writing, Cherry moved on to The Guidance Center, which provides behavioral health, substance abuse and community outreach services to children and adults. The Guidance Center is a former Crain's "Top Managed Non-Profit" recipient.

"The best grant writers are those with a background in history and policy. What really lends itself well to grant writing is being able to synthesis a variety of ideas for a variety of people. You have to communicate your ideas very clearly," Cherry said. His background in history provides him with the research, reading and organizational skills he needs. Cherry also studied political science and that helps him with the policy component of his job.

Cherry said that even though he is in his 20s, people still respect him and take him seriously. He said the challenge for him is fundraising because donors prefer to work with their peers and people they know and trust. He said fundraising is a teamwork oriented business and he is just one piece of that team.

At The Guidance Center, Cherry said the fundraisers get to ring a bell on the wall as money comes in. He said it's such an accomplishment when he gets to ring the bell. Cherry said he feels fulfilled when he see pictures of homes that were cleaned up, or pictures of families that were directly impacted by one of his grants.

"I want to see Detroit be a successful city. I always tell people I want to see 8 million people living in Detroit before I die," said Cherry.

Cherry doesn't know who nominated him for the Crain's "20 in their 20s" honor, but he was happy to receive it.

"It's a wonderful commendation. This is sometimes a thankless job and this helps me feel good about what I do. It's nice to learn that someone values it," said Cherry.

Sarah Morgan

During Morgan's senior year at Oakland University, she took a women's studies class. The class sparked her to start Think Girl, a non-profit organization dedicated to informing and empowering women through information on the Web site and community programs.

"I was really disappointed by the amount I didn't know about women's rights and women's history, so I decided to create an online resource for those topics. Over the past two-and-a-half years, it has completely snowballed beyond what I ever thought it would be," said Morgan, who started Think Girl in December 2005.

Thinkgirl.net, the Web site for Think Girl, includes women-focused columns, interviews, event and workshop listings, important historical women, books, information on women's history and resources.

Morgan, CAS '05, earned a degree in journalism and juggles Think Girl with a full-time job at WXYZ Channel 7 as a Web content producer. She said her writing background has helped her with developing proposals and press releases for Think Girl.

Morgan chose to stay in Metro Detroit and base Think Girl here because this is her hometown.

"I could move somewhere else and run away from the problems the area faces, or I could take the initiative and try to make change," Morgan said.

Morgan said the next thing to do for Think Girl is to file for non-profit status and start fundraising for programs. She would also like to start putting together workshops and a Web site similar to Think Girl that is aimed at teens. In addition, the Think Girl staff is working with the Detroit Feminists and Women's in Film and Television to produce a Feminist Summit in May 2009. The weekend-long summit, which is slated to be an annual event, will expose local and non-local participants to the strong, vibrant feminist movement in Detroit and also allow for networking, collaboration and visibility.

Morgan was nominated for the Crain's "20 in their 20s" honor by a family friend she worked for while in college.

"It's really exciting to be included with a group of such talented and driven people. And it's something I never would have expected," Morgan said. "I'm just working on issues that are important to me and to be named to the '20 in their 20s' is thrilling."

SUMMARY

Many 20-somethings leaving college set out to find a job, define themselves, get their own apartments and enter into a serious relationship. "Crain's Detroit Business" identified 20 local 20-somethings who are excelling at what they do. Two of the "20 in their 20s" on the list are OU alumni. David Cherry, a program development officer at The Guidance Center in Southgate, and Sarah Morgan, executive director of Think Girl, made the list of those in their 20s making their mark on Metro Detroit.

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