



Thursday, September 12, 2002

Flags at half-mast, OU reflects on 9-11

By **Mary E. Iorio**, OU Writer

Flags waved at half-mast at Oakland University Sept. 11 as more than 150 people gathered in the Oakland Center for a ceremony of remembering – a ceremony of music, of poetry and of quiet, thoughtful moments in honor of those lost and those who survived the terrorist attacks one year ago.

“As a nation, we are resilient, we are proud and we are united,” said Virinder Moudgil, interim vice president for Academic Affairs and provost. “If the terrorists thought this terrible act would forever change our nation, they were right. It reminds us to preserve and value the freedoms that make America what it is.... This is the land of George Washington. This is the land of Abraham Lincoln. This is the land of Martin Luther King.”

Oakland’s memorial programs began early Sept. 11, 2002, as student Caroline Cates played taps outside Kresge Library, marking the moment when the first jet struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Throughout the day, OU Student Congress urged students to register to vote and participate in the freedoms that people in so many other nations don’t have. Late in the afternoon, Campus Ministries Organizations United held a Reflections program outside O’Dowd Hall. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority ended the day with a 10 p.m. vigil in the Oakland Center Fireside Lounge.

“We each have our own story about where we were one year ago,” said Michelle Jamian, vice president of OU Student Congress. “We held hands, hugged, cried as we began to understand the severity of the attacks and the impact on America. But let’s not be sad today. Let’s walk with a proud step...and show the strength of our nation. Realize what your country offers you and get involved in your government, in your community.”

Jamian spoke before a standing-room-only crowd during a noon-hour program that began with the singing of the National Anthem and ended with the reading of a stirring **poem by Poet Laureate Billy Collins**. Representatives from across Oakland University – including OU President Gary Russi, Board of Trustees Chair Ann Nicholson, students, faculty and staff – bowed their heads during a moment of silence. Professor of Music John-Paul White broke that silence with a deeply moving performance of “America the Beautiful.”

For freshmen Angela Poma and Kristina Galba, the midday remembrance offered a retreat from the rush of classes and part-time jobs. “I wanted to do something today to remember the victims. With my course schedule, I couldn’t go to church,” Poma said. “This allowed me to gather with others and take some time to reflect.”

She and Galba donned “I Love NY” T-shirts, saying they felt their apparel appropriate for the day. Galba, like many of the students at Wednesday’s program, has several friends in the military who left college to report for service in the War on Terrorism. “They won’t know that I’m here, but I will know.”

Galba couldn’t get over the day’s similarities to the same day a year earlier. “This morning, I was driving to school, and I looked up at the sky and it was clear and blue, just like it was a year ago,” Galba said. “It felt just the same, almost eerily the same.”

But it’s not the same.

Nearly 3,000 people died in last year’s terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and four hijacked jetliners, including one that crashed in an empty Pennsylvania field. For many, daily life continues but few can say they weren’t affected by the horrific events of that single day last September.

Sophomore Robert Gutowski said he feels an obligation to keep going. “We have to keep moving. We can’t live our lives in fear.”

Gutowski was in a freshman class when the events unfolded last year. Immediately after, he walked over to the Oakland Center to be with others. He returned a year later to the same place.

Universities offer support in times of crisis, Moudgil said, whether a gathering place, as Gutowski found, or new understanding.

"We grew together," Moudgil said. "We found greater understanding of other religions, and we had the opportunity to learn how the rest of the world views America. We had the opportunity to debate and to find ways to make sense of something that makes no sense."

Moudgil urged students to live their lives fully. "We must remember to make the best of life, every moment of every day. Tomorrow is uncertain."

SUMMARY

More than 150 people gathered in the Oakland Center for a ceremony of remembering – a ceremony of music, of poetry and of quiet, thoughtful moments in honor of those lost and those who survived the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks one year ago. Oakland's memorial programs began early Sept. 11, 2002 marking the moment when the first jet struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center.

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