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Keeper of Dream winners show selflessness

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Keeper of the Dream scholarship recipients are recognized for their strong citizenship, scholarship, volunteerism and contributions to promoting cultural understanding. Crystal Allen, Steven Townsend, Crystal Wilkerson and Sumeera Younis each will receive \$5,000 at Oakland University's 11th annual **Keeper of the Dream Scholarship Awards Banquet** on Tuesday, Feb. 11, from 6:30 to 9 p.m. at Shotwell-Gustafson Pavilion. Each of the students are thrilled to have been chosen for the award, though they also will tell you that the satisfactions that come with community service take precedence over individual honors.

"Receiving this award shows that volunteering does get noticed on our campus," said Wilkerson, a junior elementary education major and recipient of the Bank One Keeper of the Dream Award. "I don't volunteer to get noticed, but it's always good to get that gratification from people, and it inspires me to continue volunteering."

Since 2000, Wilkerson has been an active member of AmeriCorps Oakland and has completed more than 1,800 hours of service to the Pontiac community while tutoring at-risk children involved with Pontiac Area Transitional Housing (PATH). In recognition of her contributions, Wilkerson's AmeriCorps peers named her "Ms. AmeriCorps" the past two years. She also has been consistently named to Oakland University's Dean's List, is a member of the SMEA-OU (Student Michigan Education Association), Oakland's Golden Key International Honour Society, and currently is president of the AmeriCorps Alumni Association.

Wilkerson, who was raised in Ortonville, said her OU experience has opened her eyes to people who are different from her high school peers.

"It's important to have an understanding of everyone who's on this planet," she said. "It builds respect, understanding and keeps peace. Oakland has a wide variety of backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities. I came from a small town that is predominantly white. I'm using my experiences at OU as a way of exploring the world."

Sophomore women's studies and sociology major Sumeera Younis is this year's recipient of the Oakland University Alumni Association Keeper of the Dream Award. Besides her active roles in Student Congress, OU Greens, Students for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and the Women's Issues Forum, Younis is president of the Muslim Students Association. She volunteers her time as a teacher at the Islamic Association of Greater Detroit and coaches high school junior varsity and varsity debate forensics.

"It's an honorable thing to receive this award and be associated with Dr. King, but the recognition is not why I'm involved in volunteering," Younis said. "In high school or college, ethnic distinctions can be negatively interpreted. That's a definite problem that carries over into business practices, and I feel it's important to address those issues in a campus environment because biases can greatly affect our society. Each individual has a lot to learn from each other – things we can celebrate about our different ethnicities."

Steven Townsend, a sophomore biochemistry major, has acted as a positive role model through leadership positions as a peer mentor for the Office of Equity and orientation group leader and connections peer leader for the Office of New Student Programs. He served as a reader for the blind by participating in the Books on Tape program through Oakland's Disability Support Services Office and has logged more than 1,500 hours of work at Henry Ford Hospital. He also acts as a supplemental instruction leader and tutor for the Academic Skills Center. For these acts, Townsend will receive the William Beaumont Hospitals Keeper of the Dream Award.

"It's a really big honor, and it's nice to be part of an elite group of students, but helping other people comes first," Townsend said. "Even if I hadn't won this award I'd still be helping people every day."

"As an orientation group leader, I try to erase any predispositions incoming students might have about race. I try to show them that college is about understanding other people's differences. There is a difference between tolerance and understanding. With tolerance, there is no caring. We should focus instead on understanding each other."

Like Townsend, junior elementary education major Crystal Allen has served as an orientation group leader and a connections peer leader at OU. She also was selected as the 2002 Greek Female Leader of the Year, received the Oakland University Alumni Association Black Affiliate Award and the Oakland University Volunteer Service Award. She also has worked as a resident assistant in the Department of Housing and as a teaching assistant at Lowry Early Childhood Education Center.

"The color of your skin does not affect your success at OU," said Allen, who is the recipient of this year's Champion Enterprises Inc. Keeper of the Dream Award. "I worked hard in my classes and received fair treatment like all students. There are so many programs to become involved with that focus on bringing students together and motivates them to succeed. For the past two years, I became involved with many student organizations to help all students see that it's possible for students of any race, color and creed to succeed at Oakland. Students need to realize that they are precious to this institution and this world. It's about what you do and the words you use that truly make a difference."

Individual seats for the Keeper of the Dream Scholarship Awards Banquet are \$100 and tables of 10 are \$1,000. For more information or to buy tickets, contact the Office of Special Events at (248) 370-4915. Historical information on the program can be found on the [Office of Equity](#) Web site.

SUMMARY

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