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Students value opportunity to see presidents

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

The recent visit by Presidents George W. Bush and Aleksander Kwasniewski to Oakland University's campus afforded OU students a number of opportunities to be involved on several different levels. Some students were invited to attend the event while others participated as volunteers. All left with the experience of a lifetime.

Many student volunteers handled duties such as ushering, crowd control, ticket handling and directing traffic. Marilyn Manoharan, a junior biochemistry major, worked as a volunteer the day before and day of the event to help ensure that things ran smoothly.

"I volunteered because I knew this was a once in a lifetime opportunity," said Manoharan, who also works in the Center for Student Activities as an office assistant. "The day before I worked inside the Recreation and Athletics Center to help make sure the seating arrangements were prepared. The next day I helped direct people to the proper entrances to the building and took tickets at the door. I also had the opportunity to work directly alongside the White House staff members. They were very friendly people. We had no problems asking them questions and they gave us clear instructions. It was hard not to get caught up in the moment, but they reminded us that our first priority was to focus on our jobs. Overall, it was a great experience."

Sophia Soldana, a junior elementary education major, forfeited her \$50 ticket to Cedar Point to volunteer at the event.

"Who's to say I will ever be able to see the president of the United States again in my life, whereas Cedar Point will always be there," said Soldana, who is an Americorps Oakland volunteer. "I also wanted to be here to see what this is all about – to find out why they are meeting here. To have not only one but two people of this importance come to campus is an honor."

Other students were fortunate enough to receive tickets by invitation. Three OU classes were invited, while others obtained tickets from the American Polish Cultural Center in Troy.

Derek Dickow, a June graduate with degrees in philosophy and political science and a former student body president, attended the event with senior political science major Elizabeth Zahra, who is the publicity director for University Student Congress. Both were impressed that OU was chosen to host the two world leaders.

"I couldn't miss this event because it's so historic for Oakland University," Dickow said. "This is going to definitely put OU's name on the map. I saw a lot of freshmen at the new student orientation today who were saying, 'Wow, President Bush is coming here!' It gives them confidence to know that they've chosen a school that's hosting such an event. I'm definitely proud to be an alumnus of OU."

"I'm really honored to represent the student body today," Zahra said. "I look forward to sharing what the two presidents have to say with our other student leaders. It's a really special day. I'm proud that the president is coming to OU and proud to be a student here because we're hosting this."

Amber Dunn, a junior marketing major, and Jason Kepsel, a senior management information systems major, work as program assistants at the university's Aquatic Center. Both listened intently to the speeches by Bush and Kwasniewski.

"This event is something I'll always remember – something I'll tell my children and grandkids," Dunn said. "It's huge for Michigan to host an event like this, let alone for OU. I also learned a lot today. I knew there was some bond between the two countries, but I didn't know it was so strong. It's a perfect time to strengthen those bonds with Poland after September 11."

"I thought this was a great opportunity to see two world leaders," Kepsel added. "I'm a supporter of Bush, and it was great to see first-hand how he handles himself and tries to work the audience with his public speaking. It was also nice to see the friendliness between the nations that we're trying to build."

Ania Matuszewska, a Polish citizen who came to OU in 1997 and graduated last May with a B.A. in journalism, was representative of the bond between the two nations and the involvement of Oakland University. She acted as one of two official greeters upon the presidents' arrival and delivered a speech prior to Bush's speech. Matuszewska also volunteered to help

translate signage and university press kits into Polish prior to the event.

"It was great – draining but exciting at the same time," Matuszewska said. "It was an honor to be chosen out of so many people to greet the presidents and deliver a speech. When the last helicopter was landing with the president, I said to [OU] President Russi, 'You only see this kind of thing in the movies.'

"My father also happened to be in the United States visiting, and he came and attended the event as well. He was so proud and happy to be there. You always want to share moments like that with your family."

SUMMARY

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