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Keeper of Dream celebrates cultural diversity

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Oakland University's commitment to diverse programs, cultural and social experiences, and its recognition of students who enhance the educational and social environment on campus and in the surrounding community was on full display during the 11th annual **Keeper of the Dream Scholarship Awards Banquet**.

More than 600 people gathered at OU's Shotwell-Gustafson Pavilion Feb. 11 to celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"Tonight's celebration gives us the opportunity to reflect on and honor the life and work of a man who made an indelible mark on American history," said OU President Gary Russi in his banquet remarks. "Not just tonight, but yearlong, we continue to value and sustain Dr. King's philosophies as we strive to create a campus community rich in diversity and multicultural activities, traditions and histories."

The banquet benefits student scholarships. The awards recognize students who have demonstrated strong citizenship, scholarship and leadership in breaking down cultural stereotypes and in promoting interracial understanding. The keynote address delivered by Edsel B. Ford II, board director of Ford Motor Company, was a special addition to this year's banquet.

This year's **award recipients** include Crystal Allen, a junior elementary education major from Flint; Steven Townsend, a sophomore biochemistry major from Detroit; Crystal Wilkerson, a senior elementary education major from Ortonville; and Sumeera Younis, a sophomore women's studies and sociology major from Shelby Township. Bank One, Champion Enterprises, the **Oakland University Alumni Association** and William Beaumont Hospital each sponsored a \$5,000 scholarship award.

"Martin Luther King did so much for people – to be honored in his name is a wonderful thing," said Allen, who served as a resident assistant in the Department of Housing and received the OU Alumni Association Black Affiliate Award and the OU Volunteer Service Award. "When I leave OU, I want to know that I gave back all that I could. Being an RA gave me the opportunity to answer questions and help other students solve problems, whether they were social or academic. In fact, a couple of the girls I worked with as an RA are doing volunteer work now. It's nice to know that I helped make a difference."

Debbie Wilkerson noted that her daughter Crystal spent countless evenings organizing volunteer activities for OU AmeriCorps, including behind-the-scenes preparation for efforts such as tutoring at-risk children involved with Pontiac Area Transitional Housing.

"It's just in Crystal's nature to volunteer," Wilkerson said. "She's always enjoyed working with kids and doing anything she could to help people less fortunate than herself. My husband and I are both very proud of her. Her 1,800 hours of AmeriCorps service are just part of it."

"She spends five to six hours at home in the evening putting together lesson plans or organizing her volunteer work. But she loves every minute of it. She was worried about completing her Keeper of the Dream application on time, but I told her that the hard work was already done – she just had to put it down on paper."

In his keynote address, Ford celebrated the value of diversity by citing the friendship of his great-grandfather, Henry Ford, and agricultural chemist George Washington Carver.

"These two men were colleagues who began by sharing knowledge and ended by sharing a friendship," Ford said. "The similarities between Henry Ford and George Washington Carver far outweigh any superficial differences. The Ford Motor Company was one of the first employers to offer equal paying jobs for African-Americans. Today the Ford Motor Company is still dedicated to equal opportunity. I'm very proud to carry on the tradition of these two great men."

"How far we've come in racial equality since my great-grandfather is a matter of debate. I believe we are making progress. We are recognizing that equality is about dignity and opportunity. Diversity allows us to bring together many unique perspectives."

After Ford's address, Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students Glenn McIntosh introduced a moving

video presentation of highlights from past Keeper of the Dream banquets, then presented a special recognition award to Dr. Kevin Early, who founded the Keeper of the Dream banquet in 1993.

"It's been a grand privilege and honor to not only serve the Keeper of the Dream banquet but also to serve all of you," Early said. "Many people have participated in organizing Keeper of the Dream – you know who you are. Through those years, we have participated in a magnificent, inspiring journey together."

OUTV, the university's cable TV station, will broadcast a recording of this year's Keeper of the Dream Banquet on various dates and times beginning next week. OUTV programming is available on Comcast Cablevision channel 74 in the following communities: Auburn Hills, Berkley, Clawson, Ferndale, Huntington Woods, Oakland Township, Pleasant Ridge, Rochester, Rochester Hills, Royal Oak and Troy.

OU students, faculty and staff can continue to reflect on Dr. King's dream during OU's **African-American Celebration Month**, which concludes Wednesday, Feb. 19.

SUMMARY

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