

Oshkosh Community Dragon Boat Scholarship awards first recipients

by Derek Paulus - Wednesday, February 27, 2013

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The Oshkosh Community Dragonboat Race & Festival has been a fixture of the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh's annual Fall Fest on the Fox since 2006, working to benefit the University campus and surrounding community.

This year, the race has set its sights on UW Oshkosh students by creating a scholarship to assist students with their tuition costs while simultaneously working to develop Oshkosh and its neighboring areas.

The \$1,000 scholarship, titled the Oshkosh Community Dragon Boat Scholarship, was created in the fall of 2012 after the races began to generate significant proceeds. The Dragonboat Race is a partnership between UW Oshkosh and the YMCA and benefits the YMCA Strong Kids Campaign, which helps financially struggling families participate in YMCA programs. The new scholarship is the most recent addition to the event's community work.

"The scholarship funds distributed this year are a direct result of the consistent outpouring of community support that makes this event possible," Executive Events Coordinator Laura Rommelfanger said.

The Dragonboat Race is held each September during Fall Fest on the Fox, a festival that has celebrated Oshkosh's waterways since 2000. A crew of up to 20 people row in a series competitive races along the Fox River in the unique dragon boat, a long and thin boat anchored in Chinese history.

The first recipients of the Dragon Boat Scholarship were Hannah Egan, a junior nursing major, and Jenell Riesner, senior marketing and interactive Web management major. Both students displayed significant involvement in campus and community activities, a considered factor in the scholarship selection process.

Coinciding with her nursing major, Egan has been involved with Colleges Against Cancer, working with Relay For Life to raise money for the battle against cancer. She is also the co-chair of fundraising for the Oshkosh Student Nurses Association.

Riesner is involved with UW Oshkosh organizations such as Campus Awareness Relationship Education (CARE), helping to educate the University on healthy relationships, and is a member of the Alpha Xi Delta sorority, which works to support Autism Speaks through their hosting of the Mr. UWO pageant.

Scholarship money has also been awarded to Riesner through her involvement with the Miss America organization. For the past three years, Riesner has participated in the Miss Oshkosh Scholarship Pageant, which awards all its participants with a minimum \$350 scholarship.

"It's nice just to see that there are people out there that are willing to give to people that are working hard and trying to go above and beyond," she said.

In addition, the Dragon Boat Scholarship sought UW Oshkosh students who demonstrated financial need and who lived or worked in Winnebago County. Representatives from several campus departments, including Reeve Memorial Union, the Chancellor's Office and the UW Oshkosh Foundation took part in the selection process. Lori Kroening, senior development specialist for the UW Oshkosh Foundation, said the scholarship benefits both students and community.

"Awarding the scholarship to people who live and/or work in the area is one way we can thank our neighbors for their support and help them realize their educational goals," Kroening said.

Egan said she appreciates this type of financial support and it has helped her to continue through college without requiring student loans.

"It's nice to have support and know that people care," she said. "I hope to one day actually sponsor or help sponsor a scholarship as well."

In addition to her income as a certified nursing assistant, Egan has earned numerous past scholarships to complement the Dragon Boat scholarship and help pay tuition costs. She earned seven scholarships in 2012, among them being several nursing focused awards such as the Affinity Nursing Scholarship, the Rose and Edwin Daniels Nursing Award—Pre-nursing and the Elmer Leach Foundation Undergraduate Nurse Award.

Riesner has also earned several scholarships to go along with the Dragon Boat Scholarship, such as the Chancellor's Junior Scholarship Award, the Oshkosh Allergy Center Marketing Scholarship and the Sales and Marketing Professionals of Northeast Wisconsin Scholarship. Riesner, who works at the Chancellor's Office, Admission's Office and the Student Recreation and Wellness Center on campus, has been an integral part of Dragonboat Race planning and organization in past years. She said she has always appreciated the event's monetary support of Oshkosh interests.

"They're giving it back not only to University students, which is... obviously the focus of UW Oshkosh, but also because the YMCA partners with it they're giving it back to the community as well," Riesner said.

The pair said they appreciate the support they have received from UW Oshkosh and the community. Egan said it is affirmation that she has put significant effort into her time at the University and she feels "honored that people can see that."

The University plans to continue to give back to its students by awarding two UW Oshkosh students with the Dragon Boat Scholarship annually. Riesner said most of her scholarships have been an example of alumni or members and organizations in the community giving back to UW Oshkosh students in the hopes of encouraging students to be a positive community force in the future.

"I always say one of the things that I love about UW Oshkosh, and Oshkosh in general, is the support from the community," Riesner said. "I've really felt that here."

Learn more:

- [Oshkosh Community Dragonboat Festival](#)