

President Bush honors UMKC student

Issue date: 6/2/08 UMKC News

UMKC School of Dentistry student Ashley Knight spends most of her spare time doing volunteer work, and some people have taken notice of this - including President George W. Bush.

The President, in Kansas for a fundraising event Thursday, May 29, met Knight at New Century AirCenter, an airport in Gardner, Kan., and presented her with the President's Volunteer Service Award directly on the tarmac next to his plane.

"It was all kind of a whirlwind and pretty overwhelming," Knight said.

Still sounding astonished at the amount of attention she's receiving, Knight said until the President started walking toward her, she was excited more than anything else.

"When he turned and looked at me, I was like, 'Oh,'" Knight said. "That's when I got real nervous. He was very relaxed. He's just a friendly, friendly guy."

Bush told her he had read about all of her volunteer work and that he was very impressed, according to Knight.

Knight's list of volunteer work is lengthy. She doesn't even know the total number of hours she has dedicated to helping others.

"I've never really kept track," she said. "I never thought anyone would care."

Every evening she works at the Kansas City Free Clinic for three hours, and she meets weekly with Youth-Friends, a mentoring organization for school-age children. She also dedicated "tons of hours" to organizing Shear Madness in December 2007, and January of this year. She gathered \$11,000 in bids for Shear Madness - an event in which UMKC students and faculty commit to having their heads shaved to raise money for sending kids to Camp Quality, a summer camp for children with cancer.

President of Students Take Action, Knight is constantly recruiting other students to dedicate time for local clinics and screenings.

She has volunteered for dental screenings with Operation Breakthrough, Team Smile (with the Kansas City Chiefs), Tots-N-Teeth, Score One for Health, the Kansas City, Kan. Art Walk and many others. Knight also travelled to Guatemala to volunteer her skills at a dental clinic.

She said, having seen the photos of herself with the President, she had proof the event actually happened Thursday and wasn't just a dream. But immediately after Bush talked with her, she was drawing a blank.

"I had no idea what we said," Knight said. "I really had to dig deep to figure it out. I remember saying, 'Well, thank you so much. It's an honor to meet you, Mr. President.' When it was all over, I wished that I'd worn a recorder or something to remember what we said."

