Purdue News

Purdue honors efforts to improve accessibility, diversity

Continuing efforts to improve disability accessibility and diversity earned Focus Awards recently for three individuals and one organization.

The annual awards recognize such work on the West Lafayette Campus. A reception on March 2 included a speaker and the award presentations in the East Faculty Lounge, Purdue Memorial Union.

The speaker was Jim Gibbons, a Purdue alumnus in industrial engineering, who is president and chief executive officer of National Industries for the Blind. He also was the first person who is blind to receive an MBA degree from Harvard University.

Gibbons said he began losing his sight at age 8 due to macular degeneration, and was fully blind by his sophomore year at Purdue. But by then, he had met Betty Nelson, now dean of students emerita, who became his first mentor. When he graduated, he got only two job offers, fewer than many classmates, but AT&T gave him a good opportunity.

"The biggest challenge I've had is changing people's expectations of me, not lowering my expectations of myself," he said. His parents taught him to have high expectations.

Gibbons also cited his three-part recipe for success by an individual or an organization: 1) skills and passion; 2) packaging oneself; 3) attitude.

The 2004 Focus Awards were:

- Faculty: James McGlothlin, associate professor of health sciences. He was the force behind the videocamera wheelchair project that has identified many access issues. In the past year, his team has added wireless transmission of video and biosensory data from the wheelchair. The team gave a demonstration of it at the reception.

• Staff: Paula Micka Pugh, former assistant dean of students. Pugh, who has moved away, worked for 10 years in Adaptive Programs. In 1994, she helped Nelson found the Advisory Council on Disability Issues for the campus. Owen Cooks, assistant to the director of engineering in Physical Facilities, accepted the award.

• Student: Kathleen Kisselburgh, 2002 alumna in psychology and sociology, posthumously. Kisselburgh, who died from injuries in an August 2003 car accident, had a hearing disability. She worked hard to help others understand the importance of guide dogs in places they might not expect, such as classrooms and airplanes. She raised concerns on campus and in town. Her sister, Lorraine Kisselburgh, who is director of information technology for the School of Liberal Arts, accepted the award.

• Organization: Tactile Access to Education for Visually Impaired Students (TAEVIS). This unit of the Office of the Dean of Students has pioneered techniques to make curricular materials available to students who are blind, visually impaired, or have other print disabilities. Founded in 1996, TAEVIS uses Braille and specially developed tactile diagrams that have won national attention. Sue Wilder, TAEVIS director, accepted the award.

Alysa Rollock, vice president for human relations, presented the awards. Diana Prieto, director of affirmative action, was moderator. Event sponsors were the Affirmative Action Office, Adaptive Programs, Physical Facilities and Human Resource Services.

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