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OUACHITA
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NEWS

For immediate release

Ouachita celebrates 20th anniversary of Tiger Serve Day on April 1

By Katie Smith

March 28, 2017

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208.



ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—Ouachita Baptist University celebrates the 20th anniversary of Tiger Serve Day this Saturday, April 1. Ouachita's Ben M. Elrod Center for Family and Community coordinates the semiannual event in which hundreds of students, faculty and staff join together to serve members of the community.

This semester's Tiger Serve Day will embrace its roots with the theme "Into the Streets," which was the theme for the first Tiger Serve Day in 1997. Ian Cosh, vice president for community and international engagement, began planning the first Tiger Serve Day in 1996. However, plans for the event took an unexpected turn when a category F-4 tornado tore through Arkadelphia on March 1, 1997.



"The concept and planning for the first Tiger Serve Day preceded the tornado in 1997, so it was always our intention to make it a permanent event," explained Cosh. "The tornado happened coincidentally and

we were able to use our planning and our equipment to serve at a time when volunteers were particularly needed.”

The tornado caused major destruction in several neighborhoods and downtown Arkadelphia. Jon Merryman, Ouachita’s current director of alumni, was a freshman at Ouachita when the tornado struck; he was doing his laundry at the Country Club Washateria.

“Police came by with bull horns telling us to stay inside and get down,” Merryman said. “I didn’t even think about there being a tornado. That night, I went to the Flippin-Perrin lobby to watch movies with some friends, and it was so eerie. Looking down the road toward downtown, every light was on at Ouachita and just past the parking lot behind Verser was complete black as far as you could see.”



OBU President Ben Sells, left, celebrates Tiger Serve Day’s 20th year with James Taylor, center, current director of campus ministries at OBU and an inaugural TSD participant, and Ian Cosh, vice president for community and international engagement and director of the Elrod Center.

“My daughter and I were at Sonic when the sirens went off to alert us of a possible tornado approaching,” explained Judy Duvall, assistant director of the Elrod Center. “We headed home to take cover. I remember my girls and husband and me waiting in the hallway of our home because it was the safest place. After the danger was over, we walked outside, and I will never ever forget all of the police and fire truck sirens that rang through the air. We knew that something terrible had happened.”

The tornado caused businesses to be wrecked, homes destroyed and churches damaged. It left six people dead and more than 100 injured in the Arkadelphia area.

“One image that has stuck with me has been pulling up near Second Baptist with the Red Cross trailer and seeing all the mobile homes in an area gone but just one left standing,” Merryman recalled. “It had a sign on it that said something like, ‘Don’t bulldoze our house! We’re coming back!’ It was sad to see so much devastation in this town I had grown to love so much my freshman year.”

Because the first Tiger Serve Day occurred shortly after the tornado, members of Ouachita’s community were presented the opportunity to help clean up the Arkadelphia community and care for local residents.

“We switched gears after the tornado hit,” Duvall said. “Because of the overwhelming need to help our neighbors with cleanup work, volunteers focused all of their attention on helping residents and businesses with practical clean up.”

Two decades ago, some faculty and staff had an idea to involve students in service. Today, that idea has blossomed into one of the biggest days of the semester. Hundreds of students, faculty and staff join together in teams on a Saturday morning and spread throughout the community, completing dozens of service projects for their neighbors.

“Because I work closely with the volunteers, the leadership team and the people served, I am fortunate to see the impact from all angles,” Duvall added. “I get to see the volunteers discover how wonderful it is to serve and help others and experience the joy that comes from giving their lives away. I hear from the people served. They are so genuinely thankful and grateful for the investment of time that is given them and the amount of work that is done.”

“I have been involved with it every year for 20 years,” Cosh said. “It has been rewarding to see that the idea of serving our community has grown stronger each year, and students have continued to experience the joy of service and the positive outcome that results. Not every good idea takes on a life of its own, but it is now hard to imagine Ouachita without Tiger Serve Day.”

This semester’s Tiger Serve Day will be held on April 1, beginning at 8:30 a.m. at the Elrod Center. Sodexo will provide breakfast and lunch for volunteers. To register to participate or for more information, visit www.obu.edu/serve or call the Elrod Center at (870) 245-5320.

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