

2-8-2017

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Katie Smith
Ouachita Baptist University

Ouachita News Bureau
Ouachita Baptist University

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Recommended Citation

Smith, Katie and News Bureau, Ouachita, "Elrod Family Foundation examines impact of community service and celebrates 20 years of service" (2017). *Press Releases*. 336.
http://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/press_releases/336

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NEWS

For immediate release

Elrod Family Foundation examines impact of community service and celebrates 20 years of service

By Katie Smith

February 8, 2017

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

ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—The Ben M. Elrod Center for Family and Community at Ouachita Baptist University hosted its annual Elrod Family Foundation board meeting recently, celebrating the 20th anniversary of the center and foundation. Faculty, staff and student volunteers gathered alongside the board members to reflect and celebrate the impact the center and its volunteers have had on the community through their service.

Ouachita President Ben Sells opened his first Elrod Family Foundation board meeting by thanking the volunteers for all of the work they represented. Dr. Ben Elrod, Ouachita's 13th president from 1988-98 and the creator of the foundation, echoed Dr. Sells' sentiments.

"We're so grateful for Ouachita, for its precious value to us, for what we see it do in the lives of so many young people," said Elrod, president of the board, in his opening prayer. "We pray your blessings and guidance over us today as we reap the benefits listening to these reports from their reporters."

The Elrod Center and Elrod Foundation were created with a central focus of inspiring young people to serve those who are less fortunate. The closing statement of the organizations' purpose statement, written by Dr. Elrod, reads, "The four great loves of my life have been God, family, Ouachita and the church. My prayerful hope is that this foundation may contribute significantly to the well-being of all men."

Ian Cosh, vice president for community and international engagement and director of the Elrod Center, discussed how the Elrod Center's mission meets the goals for the university for the years ahead and also follows what Jesus commanded of His followers. "It's that basic command of Christians: We're supposed to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, with all our strength and love our neighbor as our self," Cosh said.

Several volunteers shared their experiences serving through Elrod Center programs. Cosh explained the importance of these testimonies as they reflect only a small portion of all the community outreach the Elrod Center and Elrod Family Foundation provide.

"Not everything in life that impacts and transforms us can be measured, so that's why it is so important when students and others come up and share with you, understand that you're just getting a little piece of the mosaic of this incredible thing that is going on," he said.

Several of the programs that were highlighted included:

Thanksgiving Baskets: Lauren Archer, a freshman communication science and disorders major from Fordyce, Ark., and Brooke Bearden, a freshman communications disorders science major from Camden, Ark., helped deliver Thanksgiving baskets from the Elrod Center. This program provides baskets of food for Thanksgiving to families in need throughout Arkadelphia.

"We got to go to three different families, and the one that really stuck out to me was a lady who had a little 2-year-old son," Archer said. "When we took the basket to them, they were just really surprised and really excited and thankful."

"I'm very busy, so just taking that hour out my day going to serve others really made me so overwhelmed," Bearden said. "I realized that we live in a community where so many people are hurting and need our prayer and support, and just being able to help them made me feel so happy. I'm grateful that through the Elrod Center I was able to take that opportunity and deliver those baskets and witness to others."

TranServe: Josh Altenbaumer, a junior business and Spanish double major from Texarkana, Texas, visits an elderly man as a part of Transerve. The Transerve program allows students to have their service hours included on their transcripts, and many of these students help out with many service needs that come through the Elrod Center. Altenbaumer plays chess each week with his client who is showing signs of early Alzheimer's. "I learned how to play chess and get to hang out with him because I'm not sure how many visitors he's had," Altenbaumer said. "One of the main things I thought about was the genuine care and love for other people is something I really struggled with, ... but one of the things I've learned is that God is the ultimate healer through things like that because He showed me how to genuinely care."

Backyard Bible Club: Tori Lackey, a senior biology and Spanish double major from Lonoke, Ark., serves as a ministry leader for Backyard Bible Club, a program that teaches Bible stories to children in Arkadelphia. "Backyard Bible Club is ministering to four different types of families from four different parts of Arkadelphia but all have the same stories and all have the same hurts that God can really take and heal in an instant," Lackey said. "We not only minister to the kids ... but we also try to meet their parents."

Big Brothers/Big Sisters: Rachel Bacon, a junior biology major from Bryant, Ark., represented the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program as its ministry leader. This program pairs Ouachita students with a child from the community and gives the student the opportunity to be a mentor and leader for the child. Bacon works on the administrative side, "making sure people are prepared to be in the program, running their background checks and getting them trained," she explained. "Through this experience, I have been able to see how we can be involved in the community and how we can be involved in teaching those children."

Elrod Fellows: Dr. Amber Chelette, instructor of kinesiology and leisure studies, represented the Elrod Fellows and described how she encourages her students to be involved in community service. "The first day of classes, I hand my students their syllabi, and I inform them that they are privileged to be attending and having a college education," Chelette said. "Because of that privilege, they have a responsibility to not just use that information for themselves but to take that information and to improve the community around them. With all of my classes we have some form of project in one way or another where we go out into the community and we serve the people of Arkadelphia. It's been a joy to watch them grow and to teach that passion to my students."

Goza Study Club: John Matros, a senior accounting major from Arkadelphia, Ark., represented the Goza Study Club which involves Ouachita students tutoring students at Goza Middle School. The students involved in this program tutor at the middle school once or twice a week in all subjects. "I'm part of the baseball team, and this past fall our head coach, Kyle Hope, got the team together and really encouraged us to get out into the community and go out and serve and get involved in one of these programs," Matros explained. "Luckily, I was chosen to be part of the Goza Study Club. This was something special to me because I grew up here on Arkadelphia ... so it was awesome going back to the school I went to and seeing the teachers who taught me and getting to serve those kids."

Open Heart, Open Home: Becca Mattes, a Christian studies major from Sapulpa, Okla., began a new program, "Open Heart, Open Home," through the Elrod Center this semester. The program focuses on hospitality and is also a cooking class for students at Ouachita. Following the cooking lesson, Mattes leads a discussion on how Jesus showed hospitality in the Bible. "Hopefully, it's a practical way to feed people and welcome them in and also give them the opportunity to open their tables and let that be a vulnerable place where they can share the Lord with their guests," Mattes said.

Tiger Serve Day: Seth Bubbus, a senior finance major from Russellville, Ark., represented Tiger Serve Day as part of the Tiger Serve Day Leadership Team. Bubbus serves on the logistics team and helps prepare for the semi-annual community service event by organizing the tools the volunteers use. Bubbus described how this experience has impacted him. "It's enabled me to serve, and I feel like that's just something the Lord has enabled me to do – He's given me that gift to love service," Bubbus said. "It's enabled me to hone leadership qualities and work on discipline and communication and learn what that looks like."

Other programs represented were the Volunteer Clearinghouse, Healthy Relationships Week, Kluck Service Enrichment Grants, TaxServe, America Reads/America Counts, Peake Partnership and the Monticello's Children's Home.

"You're becoming more Christ-like" through involvement in these programs, Dr. Elrod told the volunteers. "If it's these efforts doing that, then they're certainly worthwhile."

For more information on the Elrod Center or any of these programs, visit www.obu.edu/elrod or contact the center at (870) 245-5320.

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