

## Alumni Update

September 2003

### **Meet This Year's Alumni Recognition Award Winner**

Nothing worthwhile comes easily. It's a motto that Susie Kay, SPA/BA 1986, has held close to her throughout life. As founder of the Hoop Dreams Scholarship Fund, an organization that has given out more than \$2 million in academic scholarships to graduating seniors from some of D.C.'s most challenged and low income inner city neighborhoods, Kay is quick to note that her accomplishments are nothing when compared to what the teens in Hoop Dreams have conquered.

"These kids have overcome so many obstacles by the time they are seniors in high school, they deserve more than anyone to have their dreams come true," says Kay.

The McDowell Hall resident realized her desire to help people when she started volunteering with Big Buddies, a campus organization that pairs AU students with disadvantaged high school students from Anacostia. Soon, she became deeply committed to bringing diverse communities together, and she began teaching in 1990 at H.D. Woodson High School - in the same community where she volunteered.

After teaching for a few years, Kay wanted to do more, to see her students go to college. But because of the economic and family situations many of her students came from, college was often a distant possibility. That's when she came up with the idea for Hoop Dreams (Scholarship Fund).

"It was only supposed to be a one-day charity basketball tournament. Kids from Woodson were going to play against business and community leaders from D.C. It was designed to bridge the gap between the two groups and also raise a little scholarship money for my students."

That one-day event in 1996 turned into a year-round program that's a combination of academic college scholarships, college-prep mentoring, internship programs and SAT prep courses. With founding sponsor, EDS, and additional sponsors Ted Leonsis; Hogan & Hartson, LLP; and The Princeton Review, among others, the group has helped some 700 inner city kids go to college and obtain internships in their fields of interest.

One donor, Coca-Cola, made an extra-special gift by creating and sponsoring the Coca-Cola Hoop Dreams Susie Kay Scholarship, dedicated for a student planning to attend American. Recent recipients include Kerwin Speight, SOC/BA 2002, and current student Candace Crump. Coca-

Cola also showed its appreciation for Kay when they nominated her to run the Olympic Torch through Washington, D.C., which she did in 2002.

But, it's not just the corporate sponsors who have faithfully supported the Hoop Dreams Scholarship Fund. Many AU alumni have volunteered their time and talent to make Hoop Dreams a success, including: Billy Stone SPA/BA '85, Jim Lutz SOC/BA '85, Tom Scherer SPA/BA '87, Kim Counes CAS/BA '97, Andrew Bon Salle KSB/BSBA '88; KSB/MBA '90, Fernando Aunon SPA/BA '84, Jimmy Lynne SOC/BA '85, Sean McColl SPA/BA '89, and Matt Winkler SOC/MA '99. "Susie is so dedicated and works so hard; her enthusiasm for Hoop Dreams is infectious. She puts so much of herself into the organization, it makes you want to give that much back," says Kim Counes.

Despite support for the organization, Kay has faced additional challenges in fundraising and recruiting volunteers since 9/11. "It's been difficult trying to maintain support, but we've been working hard to demonstrate that Hoop Dreams continues to provide a valuable service to the D.C. community," says Kay.

Now, Kay and her Hoop Dreams Scholarship recipients are beginning to see the fruits of their labor. The first 45 scholarship recipients have completed college, and some of the Hoop Dreams alumni, like volunteer Cynthia Greene, have returned to the program to mentor current students.

Kay hopes to continue building on the success of the program "without losing the grassroots spirit it took to make it flourish in the beginning." With Kay at the helm, it is impossible to imagine anyone losing spirit.

For more information about the Hoop Dreams Scholarship Fund, call 202-414-4774.

Susie Kay will be given the prestigious 2003 Alumni Recognition Award at the Homecoming & Reunion All-Alumni GALA on Saturday, October 18th. Register today for the GALA and all the other Homecoming & Reunion events.

-Mary Skinner