

Remembering National TRIO/GEAR UP Day



Kapkeo Souriya offered his thanks to the TRIO programs and many of the people in attendance.

The audience was standing on their feet cheering for what seemed like a minute or more. As the evening's honoree stepped up to the microphone, he felt his legs shake. He had not considered that the 200 people in attendance would find his life story so compelling.

Kapkeo Souriya, his wife Sisana, and their five daughters (Vannapha, Vanphasong, Phourasami, Panomsone, and Manivone) received the prestigious Building Bridges Award at the TRIO/GEAR UP Day banquet in recognition of their accomplishments. The family felt overwhelmed and thankful that the TRIO programs at Wichita State had noticed how they triumphed over extreme hardship. As the family's biography was shown, he likely remembered the days when his young family was forced to leave their beloved, and war-torn, Laos for a land he had only dreamed of and heard stories about.

As he spoke, offering his thanks to the TRIO programs and many of the people in attendance, he realized that his family had journeyed down a path that led to riches far greater than money—his daughters had all graduated from college. Education, he said, was important to his family. Therefore, after high school, he and his wife hoped that the daughters would go on to college.

Following Kapkeo's remarks, Phourasami shared her thoughts with the audience. She thanked her older sister, Vannapha, for guiding the rest of the sisters to Student Support Services. Because if it had not been for her, none of

the sisters would have experienced the tutoring, textbooks, and counseling that each received while being a TRIO participant. Phourasami recalled how the Student Support Services and McNair Scholars Program put her and three of her sisters on the path toward graduate school.

During the video biography, it was noted that four of the sisters had earned master's degrees and that Phourasami is finishing a doctorate degree in May 2019. As Phourasami concluded her remarks, she became emotional. Being driven from their home in Laos due to the war, coming to a foreign land, separated by an ocean, not knowing the language or American customs must have been one of the hardest things a person could endure. For this, the audience gave the Souriya family one last standing ovation.



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In addition to the family award, each program recognized one of their alumni with a Building Bridges Award. Each individual's abbreviated bio was read by LaWanda Holt-Fields, director of the McNair Scholars Program, and presented with a plaque by Associate Vice President for Special Programs Deltha Q. Colvin. Michael Kinnard of Mypictureman took photos of the alumni with the associate vice president and the program director. The honorees gave remarks and thanked the programs for all of the support received.

Other individuals recognized for outstanding achievements including Grady Landrum, director of Disability Services;

Continued from Page 4.



Provost Richard Muma, Ph.D., addressed the audience.

and, Lorene Berg, assistant director of Upward Bound Math Science Center. Earlier in the evening, Kiana Knolland, former Kansas Kids @ GEAR UP participant, was honored as well. In addition, Provost Richard Muma, Ph.D., Vice President for Diversity and Community Engagement Marche Fleming-Randle, Ph.D., Mayor Jeff Longwell, and Colvin addressed the audience.



Lorene Berg, assistant director of Upward Bound Math Science Center was also recognized.

During the day, the Office of Special Programs (OSP) hosted the College Access, Success and Retention (CARS) Conference in the Rhatigan Student Center. Presentations from many of the TRIO and GEAR UP programs on topics familiar to the respective programs were held. Attendees included university faculty and staff, public school personnel, and community agency representatives. This was the second year OSP sponsored the event as part of National TRIO/GEAR UP Day activities.

The highlight of the day was honoring current students and the alumni. Each program selected a current participant as their student of the year.

The following students were presented with medallions:

- Marissa Mullen - Communication Upward Bound
- Andrea Reed - Disability Support Services
- Sharee Mitchell - Educational Opportunity Centers
- Brianna - Kansas Kids @ GEAR UP
- Alondra Del Real - McNair Scholars Program
- Lillian Tran - Student Support Services
- Priscilla Castaneda - Talent Search
- Jasmine Garcia - Upward Bound Empowerment
- Bo Tolbert - Upward Bound Math Science
- Annai Loza - Upward Bound Wichita Prep
- Michael Collins - Veterans Upward Bound

Alumni honorees included the following individuals:

- Kristin Stinnett - Communication Upward Bound
- Jenna Smith - Disability Support Services
- Darryl Carrington - Educational Opportunity Centers
- Jessica Wingfield - Kansas Kids @ GEAR UP
- Rebecca Rodriguez Carey - McNair Scholars Program
- Anthony Dozier - Office of Special Programs
- Jennifer Nguyen - Student Support Services
- Mallela Sabas - Talent Search
- Thuy Nguyen - Upward Bound Math Science
- Mark Nola - Upward Bound Wichita Prep
- Brandon Blodgett - Veteran's Upward Bound

To end the festivities, Colvin thanked each of the TRIO and GEAR UP program directors and the staff who devote their passion and energies to the educational and career goals of the students. This year's event brought to light the magnitude and long-lasting commitment that WSU has made in providing equal educational opportunities to the citizens of Wichita, the state, and the nation through its TRIO and GEAR UP programs.



OSP directors were also recognized.