

Public Service Award Honors Spirit of Giving

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At lunchtime today (May 16), three families will meet for the first time. Bringing them to the table is a confluence of things both happy and sad, as well as a shared sense of giving. The families of seniors Kelly Holmes and Anne Marie Norman, the first recipients of a new award for public service, will meet with the family of a deceased Tulane alumnus for whom the award is named.



Anne Marie Norman and Kelly Holmes are the first recipients of a public service award honoring undergraduate civic engagement. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Holmes and Norman, both of whom will graduate tomorrow (May 17), are receiving the Jim Runsdorf Excellence in Public Service Undergraduate Student Award, a new annual honor that memorializes an alumnus who showed generosity of spirit and affection for the university and city.

"Jim was always involved with people and loved being a mentor," says his mother, Lucette Runsdorf. "He had such a wonderful time at Tulane and felt very connected to it. When he died two years ago, I felt I wanted to have something important in his name for his daughters."

Vincent Illustre, the executive director for the Tulane [Center for Public Service](#), agrees that the award is “something important.”

“It recognizes students who demonstrate social responsibility and awareness of the needs of the community,” says Illustre, who on a personal note added that it is “rewarding to work with students who have put their hearts into rebuilding the city.”

As for the recipients, both arrived at Tulane in fall 2004 — before the city needed the substantial rebuilding it now does following Hurricane Katrina.

In her freshman year, Holmes, who graduates with a double degree in psychology and neuroscience at tomorrow's commencement ceremony, gave her time to reading and “hanging out with” at-risk kids through the Boys Hope Girls Hope program.

When she returned to Tulane after Hurricane Katrina, Holmes began assisting with patients in the head trauma unit at Touro Infirmary. After being accepted as a public service fellow, she helped coordinate service-learning courses. Last summer, at a New York University-sponsored camp, she assisted children in developing behavior modifications to cope with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and associated disorders.

“Volunteering my time has made me more confident in dealing with different types of people,” says Holmes. “I know [those whom I am helping] are benefiting from me but I am also learning from them.”

Norman agrees that public service work can be transformative.

“It has offered the opportunity to interact with others who aren't Tulane students,” she says. “Going out into the community is amazing.”

In her freshman year, Norman, who is graduating with a degree in biomedical engineering, tutored children in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans. That project, like most of the neighborhood, was washed away by the storm. In her sophomore year, Norman became involved as a project coordinator primarily focused on the cleanup of Gert Town, an area of New Orleans hard-hit by the storm, but still intact. For the next 18 months she worked with the Gert Town Revival Initiative and its community

center, assisting in the neighborhood's recovery.

At the same time, Norman took on more responsibility in [CACTUS](#), the university's largest community service organization, eventually becoming chair of its governing board.

For the next two years, Norman has committed to teaching biology in Washington, D.C., through the Teach for America program.

Holmes will return to Tulane for another year, to complete a graduate thesis on posttraumatic stress disorder in adolescents.

The Jim Runsdorf Excellence in Public Service Undergraduate Student Award is open to graduating seniors who have completed a minimum of 75 hours of public service throughout their undergraduate studies.