

Release

Partnership Between UAlbany and Community Reaches Milestone 15th Anniversary of Committee on University and Community Relations

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ALBANY, N.Y. (March 21, 2006) -- The University at Albany has honored individuals who shaped, strengthened, and ensured the success of the Committee on University and Community Relations—a partnership between UAlbany and area residents, businesses, local law enforcement, and colleges. The celebration, held on March 21 at the First Lutheran Church Hall in Albany, commemorated the 15th year of educating students and the community about alcohol, safety, and crime prevention.

Created by a task force in 1990, the Committee on University and Community Relations began with its primary goal of addressing unrest in neighborhood communities attributed to UAlbany students. From there, it developed and expanded into a full-fledged educational and preventive program incorporating area businesses, tavern owners, the Albany Police Department, and local colleges including The College of Saint Rose, Sage College, Albany College of Pharmacy, and Albany Medical College reaching out to hundreds of thousands of students and residents.

"The sustaining power of the Committee on University and Community Relations is realized through the active and enthusiastic participation from neighborhood businesses, colleges, and community groups," said University at Albany President Kermit L. Hall. "We're proud to be honoring its successes, and look forward to continued collaborations for the benefit of our students, neighbors, and the city of Albany."

The key to the Committee is a four-step process used to address problems called the Four Es: Education, Enforcement, Environment, and Evaluation. Committee chair, Thomas L. Gebhardt takes to the streets regularly to distribute literature to off-campus students and area residents, meet with tavern owners, and discuss safety and quality of life issues. To date the Committee has held 171 monthly meetings, distributed 15,000 off-campus Student Survival Guides, passed out 18,000 "good neighbor" packets door-to-door, and disseminated 66,000 door tags about off-campus parties, drinking, and noise.

"Grassroots partnerships involving universities, colleges, and neighborhood residents are vital to preserving the character and vitality of the city," said College of Saint Rose President R. Mark Sullivan. "We need to instill in our students a sense of responsibility in how they interact with the permanent members of our community; and the Committee has facilitated a number of model programs that have allowed all the partners to coexist in our city."

The Committee works closely with the Albany Police Department, the NYS Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control, and local tavern owners on enforcement issues including identifying "cooperating taverns" with special lights; tracking, following-up on and establishing protocol for house parties; and managing an off-campus hotline. Changing the environment is another crucial part of the process and the Committee participates in neighborhood clean-ups, promotes and communicates "good neighbor" tips to college student tenants, and established the Tavern Owner Advertisement Agreement to promote responsible behavior among and alcohol advertising aimed at college students.

The final crucial step in the process is evaluating the process and its impact on students and the community. The Committee tracks off-campus hotline calls, gathers feedback from neighborhood representatives and tracks police reports involving university students. The Four-E process has been a successful approach and has consistently reduced instances of off-campus hotline calls and arrests in the following areas: off-campus noise ordinances, possession of a forged instrument, criminal impersonation, driving while intoxicated, and all alcohol-related arrests.

"The future success of the Committee," Gebhardt noted, "depends upon meeting the challenge of maintaining its goals, through the established partnerships the Committee has fostered over the years." "These goals include improving town-gown



Albany Police Department (APD) Officers Kathleen Rissberger (left) and Karen Mink (far right) received the Public Official Award, Laurie Lieman (2nd from left) received the Neighborhood Award, Thomas Gebhardt (3rd from left) received a plaque from the APD for 15 years of leading the Committee, Julie Byron (3rd from right and Michael Byron's daughter) accepted the Business Award on his behalf, and Reverend Vernon Victorson (2nd from right) received honorable mention in the Neighborhood Award.

relations, making life safer off campus, dealing with underage drinking and the abuse of alcohol by college students, and improving the quality of life in the neighborhoods where college students reside."

The Committee has been recognized for numerous awards and achievements over its tenure. In June, 2004 they were recognized by the State University of New York Council for University Affairs and Development in the "Best of Category Award for Excellence in Community Relations" for "Takin' It To The Streets: A Successful Social Norms Campaign Targeting Long-Term Neighbors in the Community". The COMMITTEE and the Pine Hills & Beverwyck Neighborhood Associations received second place in the 1997 Neighborhood of the Year Awards by Neighborhoods, USA. And, in 1995, the Neighborhood Resource Center in Albany recognized the COMMITTEE as the Organization of the Year.

The Committee honored a few of its own for outstanding contributions and commitment to the mission. Award presentations included Michael Byron, owner, Washington Tavern and The Ginger Man; Officers Kathleen Rissberger and Karen Mink, Albany Police Department, Center Station; Reverend Vernon Victorson, First Lutheran Church; and Laurie Lieman, resident and member of the Pine Hills Neighborhood Association.

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