

Community Connections

By Lindsey V. Corey

UMKC recognized nationally for being neighborly

UMKC is being recognized as Kansas City's University well beyond the metro area. The University was named a top 25 "best neighbor" institution for its community partnerships by the New England Board of Higher Education.

"This award recognizes that UMKC has taken its rightful place in Kansas City and is responsive to its underserved peoples, to its economic possibilities and to its educational needs," says Chancellor Guy Bailey. "To us, this is only what an urban university should do."

Evan Dobelle, president and CEO of the New England Board of Higher Education, ranked UMKC 23rd after a two-year study of universities and their communities nationwide.

"During my research, I became quite impressed by the University of Missouri-Kansas City's devotion to its community," Dobelle says. "Through programs ranging from local business incubation to

improved urban education, UMKC clearly demonstrates that it is deeply committed to investing in and advancing the community. I can't imagine Kansas City without UMKC."

The University also was one of 100 colleges to make the first U.S. President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for local efforts and national contributions on behalf of Hurricane Katrina survivors.

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"The enriching climate of engagement at UMKC nurtures and produces graduates who are active citizens," says Provost Bruce Bubacz.

UMKC volunteers are actively involved at Operation Breakthrough, where nursing

students and faculty assist in the clinic, Conservatory scholars offer lessons, and business students create databases they hope will enhance the nonprofit agency's grant applications.

Operation Breakthrough enrolls 620 children in its childcare and educational programs and offers free food, clothing and health care to hundreds more.

Students from more than half of UMKC's academic units make up about 20 percent of the organization's 300 volunteers. They rock babies, lead book clubs and coordinate art exhibits to showcase work by the homeless and low-income children.

"UMKC was the first college to approach me about a service learning collaboration," says Jenny Horsley, Operation Breakthrough volunteer services director. "It's wonderful because they're translating what they've learned in the classroom into the needs of the community." ■

Children's music isn't elementary here



Chad Falkin practices for the Roo Singers' next performance.

Students in the UMKC Community Music and Dance Academy are reading notes before they're reading words thanks to Roo Singers director and Conservatory graduate student Beth Watts.

"We've worked on breath management, rhythm basics, note reading and the difference between singing and speaking," Watts says. "It's so good for a young person to understand music. It's mathematical, historical, linguistic and physical. All that general education is mixed into one fun way to learn."

Each week the group of kindergarten through second graders explores the basics of being a chorale musician until it's time to show off their skills in a Roo Singers recital.

UMKC faculty and graduate students like Watts lead camps, clinics and private lessons for thousands of area children annually through the Community Music and Dance Academy.

"They get to work with world class musicians from the Conservatory at such a young age," Watts says. "It's really a unique opportunity."

University affiliate ignites lifelong learning



SPARK members Suzi Cascio and Carol Wagner discuss their latest reading.

Education excites George Satterlee. The 76-year-old retiree is an active student through SPARK (Senior Peers Actively Renewing Knowledge), a UMKC-affiliated organization offering classes to more than 300 area residents ages 55 to 95.

"It's good to keep your mind active and hear different points of view," Satterlee says. "Seniors need to be able to gather together and stay involved in education."

SPARK's current events courses and technology labs ensure seniors aren't stuck in the past. Classes range from the enlightening like The Truth About Lying to eBay tutorials.

"These aren't Pollyanna courses," says

Coordinator Pat Mielke. "Sure, seniors want to socialize, but they're also really interested in world religion, literature and music."

And they're interested in learning new skills like speaking Spanish and operating a digital camera.

All courses are taught by volunteers, many of them current and retired UMKC faculty members.

"The professors love to teach our seniors because they come up with interesting points and questions based on their experiences that college kids haven't had yet," Mielke says. "SPARK members really want to be there and appreciate the lifelong learning opportunity."

Pharmacy students discuss dangers of drugs

Lauren Mareschal wants to make sure fourth graders understand the difference between good drugs and bad.

She and other UMKC School of Pharmacy students have been educating Kansas City youth through Project Outreach, an award-winning drug abuse prevention program, since its creation by their predecessors in 1988.

"The grant money we were awarded then

ran out a long time ago, but we were still able to adapt and grow," says Mary Euler, Ph.D., Project Outreach faculty adviser and assistant dean. "Our students realize they have responsibilities to prevent drug abuse in our society beyond prescriptions and have continued to make supporting this initiative a priority."

The pharmacy students engage fourth graders through games designed

to emphasize the importance of making healthy choices while promoting the pharmacy profession.

"They're getting to a very influential age so it's really rewarding to see these kids excited and armed with the confidence to make good decisions," Mareschal says. "We keep going back because we feel like we're helping to guide them in the right direction."

Students offer free legal aid for children and families

The UMKC School of Law's Child and Family Services Clinic helps the helpless.

That's why Jennifer Thomas decided to become a lawyer, "for the kids." And through the clinic, the third-year law student is discovering the ins and outs of family law from filing paperwork to her first opportunity to question in court.

"The community needs this support and advocacy," she says. "These kids really are helpless, so it's important that we do what we can to make sure they have stable environments."

Last year, the clinic handled 45 cases, finding permanent homes for 65 children through adoptions to custody modifications at no charge to the families. Thomas has helped seven families so far.

"My clients have been so incredibly grateful, because we're providing a service they couldn't otherwise afford," she says. "Gaining permanency for these kids is really rewarding. It means a lot to them just to know where they'll be every night."

Attorney and Associate Professor Mary Kay O'Malley supervises the family law students as director of the clinic but allows them to meet with clients and represent them in front of a judge.

"It's a great program and these are great students who love the work and make UMKC proud," O'Malley says. "We need to raise the bar on the practice of family law, because children's lives and family relationships are at stake. Future lawyers really need to learn about dealing with these issues. And that's

what we're doing with these students, giving them a good foundation so they can become respected in practice."



Jennifer Thomas and Mary Kay O'Malley