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Grounds Crew Honored for Award

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Surrounded by green trees, with the sweet smell of flowers in the air, the Grounds Services crew of Illinois Wesleyan University gathered at a reception to hear praise from President Richard F. Wilson on the patio of The Ames Library.

Earlier this week, Wilson and University Librarian Karen Schmidt accepted a 2008 Beautification Award honoring the library from the Citizens Beautification Committee and the City of Bloomington at the Bloomington City Council meeting.

“When they gave us the award, Karen and I looked at each other and said, ‘We’re not the ones who should be here receiving this,’” said Wilson. “It should be the grounds crew here. We have inherited this from all of you.” The library opened in 2002, and Wilson arrived on campus five years ago. Schmidt is celebrating her first year with Illinois Wesleyan. “The library grounds are a gorgeous front door for the University, and it speaks highly of the work all of you do that the city is recognizing that,” said Wilson.

Schmidt noted the crew should be honored because of the highly competitive nature of the award. “More than 100 residential and commercial properties were nominated for the award this year,” said Schmidt. “These grounds are so stunning, that I believe the committee thought of it as a slam dunk.”

Only 23 properties received the award this year. The letter sent by Stan Cain, the chairman of the Citizens Beautification Committee, declared the library “a significant facility” that “greatly enhances Bloomington’s prosperity.”

Sue Stroyan-Bennett, the public services librarian for Illinois Wesleyan, was head librarian when the library was dedicated six years ago. “This group of people have done so much and should truly be congratulated,” she said, noting several members of the crew who helped modify the original landscape plans for the library. “The plans came from an architect in Boston, and several members of the crew knew what plants would do well and what wouldn’t in the Midwest and they modified them to great success,” she said.

Grounds Crew Manager Eric Nelson remembered receiving the plans. “We poured over the designs when they first came from Boston,” he said. “I have to tell you, Art Killian, Adam Radar, Ken Detloff, all these guys make such a great team. We couldn’t have gotten things done without them.” Nelson calls the award an honor. “It’s great to be recognized by the city, and know we have a team that gets the job done. I am very blessed to work with a staff which is very talented.”

Detloff, who has been on the grounds crew for 20 years, said he has gained a new appreciation for his work. “I’ve always known that when people come onto campus, the grounds are the first thing they see. But my daughter is at an age where she is looking at colleges, and now more than ever, I see how important that first impression is.”

Dan Dietsch, who joined the crew two months ago, agreed. “That first impression leads students to seek out the rest of the campus,” he said. Dietsch worked for years as a night security guard for Illinois Wesleyan and would help out the grounds crew in the summer months. “Dan went without sleep, working nights on security and days with us,” said Detloff. “But we are without student workers in the summer, and we really appreciated the help getting the campus ready for fall.” For Dietsch, it was the people that drew him to work full time with the grounds crew. “It’s such a great bunch of people,” he said, “but it’s also the diversity of work. I’m never doing the same thing all the time. There’s so much to do.”

The draw of working outside inspired Illinois Wesleyan senior Tony Feminis to join the crew as a student worker four years ago. “I’m inside studying all day, so it’s almost a break, a breath of air, to come to work,” he said. An economics and business administration major, Feminis said the award strengthens the bond between the campus and the city. “You can feel isolated as a student on campus, but the award really opens up your view that we are part of the community.”

Schmidt, who has resided in Bloomington for years, believes the building and grounds are more than beneficial for the community. “This library is a gift for the University and the community, a wonderful gift,” she said.

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