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Jessica Lampert, M.A., OTR, a doctoral student in TWU's College of Health Sciences, to be honored with Virginia Chandler Dykes Scholarship

Lampert's career path was inspired by her mother's disability

Dallas, TX – January 21, 2009 – Jessica Lampert, M.A., OTR, a doctoral student in TWU's College Health Sciences, will receive one of four prestigious scholarships given by TWU at the Seventh Annual Virginia Chandler Dykes Leadership Award luncheon, presented by Bank of Texas and Bank of Texas Private Bank, Thurs., Feb. 26, at noon, at The Belo Mansion and Pavilion. Jessica has provided services in the public school system for more than 20 years. After completing her graduate work, she would like continue her work in pediatric occupational therapy and become involved in research. Lampert's scholarship is sponsored by Martin, Fletcher.

"Occupational therapy was a natural career path for me," says Lampert. "My mother had disabling arthritis and later a series of strokes. I only remember her as someone with a disability. If there was something she couldn't do, we worked to help figure out a way, and it sort of became a joke. When we'd talk to the therapists back then, many times we had already implemented their suggestions!"

Lampert received a bachelor's degree in Occupational Therapy from TWU and loved the program. She knew she wanted to work with children. When she first began working in the Dallas Independent School District, she was assigned to work with the program for visually impaired children. The opportunity was unusual for an OT at the time.

"I loved working with and learning from all the professionals in the Vision Program. The role of the school-based OT is to assist children in participating in school and developing readiness for post-school environments. In the Vision Program, the OT became part of the larger team of teachers and Orientation and Mobility Specialists to work toward that end. Margaret Freeman, OTR, taught me the intricacies of OT for children with visual impairments. Fran Hammer, M.Ed. and Carmen Anderson, OTR (Vision Program and OT supervisors, respectively) provided unwavering support and encouragement."

Lampert decided to pursue a master's degree in the field. She has her master's in special education with certification in Orientation and Mobility and is a certified low vision therapist.

As a volunteer, Lampert has created community volunteer experiences for teens that are blind or visually impaired. She is exploring the possibility of having OT master's students serve as job coaches for such volunteer experiences.

Studies have shown that volunteering can contribute to developing job skills. Sometimes facilities that normally use teen volunteers have concerns about liability and possibly having to pull staff to help the teen who is visually impaired or blind.

"This is where my idea came from," added Lampert. "If we could provide someone to the facilities as a volunteer to coach the students, that would create more opportunities, provide support if it is needed, and help develop skills for independence in a 'real life' context. A goal is that once skills are developed and relationships with agencies formed, the individual will continue volunteering on his or her own. I volunteered at a nursing home (Grace Presbyterian) as a job coach with a visually impaired teen this summer and it was a wonderful experience for all parties. I saw what some of the challenges were as well. I do know there is a need for this, but it is still in the early planning stages."

Lampert has enjoyed her experience at TWU and could not have imagined a more supportive environment. "I was apprehensive about becoming a student again at my age, but I couldn't have asked for more," added Lampert. "The program at TWU is very flexible and the quality of education is superb."

"My mother taught me an incredible level of perseverance," added Lampert. "The real focus was not on her disability but on the fact that she continued to participate in daily life at home and

in the community. If she couldn't do it in the typical way, she figured out a new way. This is the very essence of the field of OT, and my inspiration."

For more information on the TWU's Seventh Annual Virginia Chandler Dykes Leadership Award Luncheon and to purchase tickets, contact Carolyn Ishee, TWU Executive Director, Institutional Development, 940-898-3869 or cishee@twu.edu.

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