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Today's Paper

Thursday, July 30, 2009

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Two Guelph students make the grade

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June 04, 2009

Joanne Shuttleworth
Mercury Staff

GUELPH

All it takes to get on Youth in Motion's 20 Under 20 list is to be under 20 and either climb a mountain for a good cause or save the world from hunger.

That's all it took at least for Lauren Wallace, the mountain climber, and Isdin Oke, the food researcher, both students at the University of Guelph.

"They are both amazing students," said Brenda Whiteside, associate vice-president of student affairs at the U of G.

"Isdin is such a great young man and we think his research will go so far. We were really pleased when he came to Guelph. And Lauren is so committed to making a difference in the world. She organized that fundraiser and did it effortlessly. She's so talented that way."

Wallace, who turned 20 in January, successfully scaled Mount Kilimanjaro at Christmas and raised \$16,000 for the local Masai for Africa campaign in a project she calls The Climb to End AIDS.

The arts and sciences student was a top 40 finalist in 20 Under 20 a few years ago for work she did with food banks in her hometown of Hamilton.

"I've always been rooted in the community," Wallace said yesterday after an awards breakfast in Toronto. "You get a good feeling about yourself. What you give is what you get back."



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Climb to End AIDS took two years to plan including convincing faculty to allow some of her preparatory research to be included in an independent study course.

"I saw overcoming AIDS a huge task, something like moving a mountain," she said. "Why not climb a mountain to make the point?"

Oke, 18, had already made a name for himself while still a student at Centennial CVI -- as the 2008 winner of the national Brain Bee competition, a first place finish in the Pascal math contest, on the school's Reach for the Top team and competing in the National Biology Competition.

A scientist and humanitarian, Oke looks for scientific solutions to the world's problems. It was the gold-medal-winning work he did for the Waterloo-Wellington Science and Engineering fair last year that drew the attention of the University of Guelph.

Even before he was accepted there, Oke worked with researcher Dr. Paliyath, who was looking at cut flowers and how to make them last longer.

"Basically he was trying to slow down the degradation process, which I thought could be used other ways, including for food," Oke said yesterday. Because of the project's innovative and unique solution, Oke received a gold medal at the Waterloo-Wellington Science and Engineering Fair last year.

"The University of Guelph has been a huge asset for me. The professors there are so approachable and willing to help an eager student."

"They are supposed to make you feel inadequate," joked Jennifer Basso, spokesperson for Youth in Motion, of the 20 formidable winners of this year's national contest.

"They really are amazing."

ON THE WEB

www.youth-in-motion.ca or www.top20under20.ca

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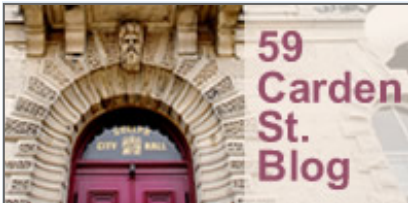
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