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Three Women to Share UMaine Salutatorian Honor

Date: May 11, 2000 Contact: Joe Carr at (207) 581-3571

ORONO -- Four University of Maine students will share the honor of being class salutatorian when the Class of 2000 graduates of May 20. The following are profiles of each of these outstanding students.

Calah Tenney

It seems that Calah Tenney's life has always been on a fast track. She graduated two years early from John Baptist Memorial High School in Bangor, and then spent the next five years training in the hope of a place on the United States Equestrian Team. When she was long-listed for the 1996 Olympic Games, she turned her attention to college.

"I learned (I couldn't) make a living in horses," says Tenney, who lives in Palmyra. "I also was a different person at 20 than I was when I was as a 15-year-old high school graduate. I started at the University of Maine at Augusta where I had the most amazing chemistry teacher, Susan Baker, and fell in love with science. I wanted to be a biochemist."

Three years ago, Tenney transferred to UMaine. She started classes in January, just days after her marriage to Andrew Fiske of Cape Elizabeth, who also is graduating this month with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering.

One of Tenney's first biochemistry classes was with Associate Professor of Biochemistry Keith Hutchison, who has since become her mentor. "Keith is a talented teacher," says Tenney of the 1999 Presidential Teaching Award recipient. "Outside of academics, I learned from him the importance of scientific integrity, sticking to projects when they're not going well, and professional problem solving.

"I didn't come to the University of Maine expecting a top-flight education, but that's what I got."

Tenney has been involved in genetics research. In particular, she is involved in attempting to isolate and look at the expression of a gene implicated in angiogenesis, a process seen both in development and vascularization of tumors in cancer. Such basic research with zebrafish could one day contribute to a therapy for treating cancer. Her research in Hutchison's lab has been partially funded by a fellowship from Pfizer Pharmaceuticals. She also participated in a summer internship at the Maine Medical Center Research Institute. Her honors thesis is based on the last two semesters of research. Tenney, a UMaine salutatorian, is graduating with degrees in biochemistry, and in molecular and cellular biology.

"I flunked out of honors chemistry in high school," says Tenney. "A lot of what motivates me now has to do with my hospice work. There's a big connection for me between my research and my work as a hospice volunteer. When I go to medical school, I want to be an oncologist." Following graduation, Tenney will spend a year as a research assistant at The Jackson Laboratory. She'll then head to medical school.

Tenney expects her career to be a combination of research and a pediatric oncology practice.

Susan Pellerin

Susan Pellerin of Monroe isn't very comfortable being in the salutatorian spotlight. As an elementary education major who lives in a household where "academics is in the family," Pellerin is a firm believer that everyone has abilities that can contribute to individual success.

"I just happen to work hard," says Pellerin. "My husband and children have been very supportive.

"But when my parents heard I would be salutatorian, they were ecstatic. They know how hard I work."

Prior to enrolling at UMaine four years ago, Pellerin had earned a business degree from Beal College. She spent several years raising her three sons and substitute teaching before committing to the 40-mile commute three times a week to attend classes in Orono. Her husband, Ted, teaches physics and chemistry at Belfast High School.

"Elementary education has always been an interest," Pellerin says. "I like those ages and teaching subjects across disciplines lends itself to providing interdisciplinary education, making connections between subjects."

Despite her familiarity with the classroom, Pellerin admits she was nervous returning to post-secondary education.

"I had been out of school about 20 years," she says. "I was concerned about the age difference between me and the other students, but I found everyone very accepting."

"My first day in a biology class my first semester, I was sitting in Corbett Hall, the lights went down for the lecture/overhead presentation. All I could think of was 'here I am after so many years."

Pellerin found herself "enjoying being around 20-year-olds" because they are so positive, open and accepting. "In teaching, that's a good lesson to learn," she says.

In turn, with her strong work ethic, Pellerin was a role model for the traditional students.

"I do have a work ethic, plus I love to learn," she says. "I've enjoyed every class. Studying for me is a pleasure."

In the last four years, that studying often has been done across the table from her three sons, ages 11-17 - Nick, Daniel and Greg. Pellerin completed her student teaching this semester at Newburgh Elementary School. For much of the remainder of the semester, she is teaching third grade in the school.

"Anytime I'm in the classroom working with children, I reaffirm my decision to become an educator," she says.

Hollie Gowen

The valedictorian of York High School in 1995 is now a salutatorian at the University of Maine.

Hollie Gowen of York is graduating with a bachelor's degree in journalism. Journalism is a natural pursuit for Gowen, who was active on her high school paper. Gowen's sister received a degree in journalism from Syracuse University and now writes for Parents magazine.

Gowen came to UMaine in 1997. In the past three years, she has been a Maine Campus reporter. Her academic achievements have been recognized with two Edward M. Holmes Scholarships and a Maine Press Association Scholarship.

Gowen attributes her academic success to "a good work ethic and a good memory. I'm always pretty motivated to do the best I can," she says.

Among her most memorable news stories was recent a co-bylined piece on hunger.

"Kathryn Olmstead and Marie Tessier were the two most influential faculty on me," she says. "They have two different styles - Olmstead low-key yet always encouraging, Tessier hard-nosed with a set style I still write in."

In addition to finding her niche in journalism, Gowen discovered the challenges of the Honors Program.

"Honors made me think and work, challenging me in areas different from the regular curriculum," says Gowen, whose honors thesis focuses on the media's portrayal of the strategic bombing campaigns of World War II.

At UMaine, Gowen also has been an active member of Chi Omega sorority. Following graduation, she and two other graduating seniors from the sorority are moving to Boston.