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One Million Degrees Honors Record 250 Community College Scholar Graduates

State's Attorney Kim Foxx Praises Students' Success, Notes Community Impact

Chicago, IL, June 22, 2017—[One Million Degrees](#) (OMD) honored 250 graduates from 10 Chicago-area community colleges at its annual Scholar Awards Night on June 20, an evening celebrating the achievements of a record number of students in OMD's programs to promote success in school, work, and life. As the OMD Scholars embark on their next phase, earning a degree at a four-year college or beginning their career, keynote speaker Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx noted the ripple effect the graduates will have. "[One Million Degrees] knows that your success breeds success for all of us here in Cook County and Chicago. The better that you all do, the better that we all do. We're interconnected here."

The Scholar Awards, held at Malcolm X College, marked a milestone in the lives of the Chicago area community college Scholars, highly-motivated, high-potential students, who often lack the financial resources and support system required to graduate. OMD CEO Paige Ponder cited the "incredible drive and determination that all One Million Degrees Scholars have to achieve their goals." She added, "Your story – the story of who you are, where you've come from, what you aspire to become, the lessons you've learned along the way, and what you have to contribute to the world – is your greatest asset and strength."

OMD is the only organization in Illinois exclusively focused on surrounding community college students with the essential supports – mentoring, tutoring, professional development, and a financial stipend – to help them excel academically, complete their degrees, and launch their careers. Ponder thanked OMD's cohort of volunteer coaches – "big-hearted individuals from every industry and every community in the Chicago region who are playing a critical role in helping people with huge potential achieve their aspirations." She also extended her appreciation to "the incredible OMD staff, who work side-by-side with scholars every day. You are the heart and soul of One Million Degrees."

Alumnus of the Year Lavada Kimble provided testament to the determination of Scholars to succeed, often against daunting odds. Kimble graduated from Kennedy-King College a year ago and is currently studying pre-med at Roosevelt University. She is committed to fulfilling the last wishes of her father – to earn a degree and help her community – and credited OMD for helping her succeed. “I was taken in by the sheer resilience and passion they had for the success of their students,” she said. “We owe it to ourselves to be great. One Million Degrees is one of the support systems we need in this journey of developing our greatness, and just think of them as the foundation that we then build on. OMD becomes a permanent family in your life and is always there when you need them even after community college.”

Also honored at the ceremony, attended by President David Sanders of Malcolm X and President David Potash of Wilbur Wright College, were:

- Joyce Campbell-Smith, Scholar of the Year (from Richard J. Daley College);
- Megan McCormick (City of Chicago) and Jessica Papa (Suburban), Staff Members of the Year
- Lisa Kueng, Director of Creative Campaigns, Invesco, Coach of the Year (Malcolm X)

The event capped an extraordinary year for OMD. The organization received the Philanthropy Award from the Make It Better Foundation and the Chicago Innovation Award. In April, One Million Degrees formally announced a partnership with global financial services company Aon plc to support a new apprenticeship program for students at City Colleges of Chicago. In early June, OMD raised a record \$775,000 – 40% more than a year ago – at its 10th Annual Food & Wine Tasting, support that will underpin future growth to serve 1,000 students in the 2018-19 school year.

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About One Million Degrees: One Million Degrees is the only organization in Illinois and one of few in the country dedicated to providing comprehensive supports to low-income, highly motivated community college students to help them succeed in school, in work, and in life. From tutors and coaches to financial assistance and professional development, OMD offers the support that empowers scholars to transform their lives and those around them for generations.

OMD Scholars graduate at twice the state average with the skills and experiences necessary to launch economically mobile careers. OMD partners with 10 Chicago-area community colleges, including the seven City Colleges of Chicago, College of Lake County, Harper College, and Prairie State College. OMD currently serves 700 Scholars across the region, with plans to grow to 1,000 Scholars in the 2018-19 academic year. To learn more about One Million Degrees, please visit www.onemilliondegrees.org.