

NEWS RELEASE

Moms Association
at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
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Moms Association Announces 2009 Humanitarian Awards

Urbana – Zenobia Ravji of Westmont, Illinois, a graduate student in Political Science in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, and Ashley Soriano of Rockford, Illinois, a junior in majoring in the Teaching of Spanish in the College of Education are the graduate and undergraduate recipients of the 2009 Moms Association Humanitarian Awards. Each recipient will receive a \$250 cash award and a matching donation will be made to a charity or organization of their choice on their behalf. The recipients were selected for their initiative to develop innovative approaches to community service work and the ability to translate their ideas into practical results. Recipients will be honored at the Moms Weekend Annual Meeting on Saturday, April 18, 2009 and will be recognized as part of the Vice Chancellor’s Student Leadership Awards ceremony on Saturday, April 25, 2009.

Since first setting foot on campus, Zenobia Ravji dedicated her time at the University of Illinois to educate herself and others about issues of social inequality and injustice. Described by her nominator as “an avid crusader for cultural understanding,” Zenobia became involved as an undergraduate in Together Encouraging the Appreciation of Multiculturalism (T.E.A.M).and has

continued her involvement during her graduate career. Through T.E.A.M., Zenobia has planned campus-wide multicultural events, facilitated workshops on racial tension and mentored her younger peers toward becoming champions of diversity themselves. Aware of the importance of an international perspective, Zenobia has led students on volunteer trips to Latin American countries to provide aid in the areas of community development and health care. During her tenure with the Illinois Student Senate, Zenobia worked with the University's Division of Housing to revamp the residence hall assignment method, replacing an outdated system that Zenobia believed led to unintentional segregation among students. Zenobia also serves as an advocate for the rights of those living in impoverished areas of Urbana-Champaign. She has challenged discrimination and racism in her peers, her administration, and even in her city, all with a passion that inspires others to make this world a more inclusive place.

Undergraduate recipient, Ashley Soriano is honored for her courageous ability to turn tragedy into triumph. She is described by her nominator as a young woman who shows "leadership and grace in the face of challenge." Years ago, Ashley learned that her mother Nanci had been diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa, or RP, a degenerative eye disease that would cause Ashley's mom to lose her sight. To make this news more devastating, it became clear that Ashley and her two siblings had inherited the disease and would one day face the same blindness. Determined to meet this prognosis head on, Ashley adopted the same strength and resolve that her mother had shown and decided to combat the disease.

Here at the University of Illinois, Ashley has created an organization called iWalk, in an effort to raise funds for research and create awareness for degenerative eye diseases such as RP. On April 25th, iWalk will host its first annual "Experiential iWalk and 5K Run" on the U of I campus. Not only will this event serve as a fundraiser, but participants can elect to complete a

portion of the race wearing goggles that simulate vision loss, so that they can truly experience what individuals with degenerative eye diseases battle on a daily basis. Ashley's dedication to raising awareness and providing innovative education about a relatively unknown medical condition exemplify the qualities that Humanitarian Award was designed to recognize.

For more information about the Humanitarian Awards and the Moms Association, please visit our website at www.uofiparentprograms.uiuc.edu or call the Parent Programs Office at 217.333.7063

The Moms Association at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, established in 1923, is believed to be one of the nation's longest-serving parent organizations. The Association supports programs, services and activities that promote the health, safety and well-being of the University community and serves as the parent liaison to the campus.

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