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O'Shea receives national honor

By Jennifer Jefferson
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On Thursday, Florida State University student Joe O'Shea made local and national headlines.

O'Shea, an FSU philosophy student, was named to USA Today's 2007 All-USA College Academic First Team. Only 20 students nationally get this honor.

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"This award rarely goes to juniors," said Jamie Purcell, FSU's director of the Office of National Fellowships. "Last year, all of the First Team members were seniors-half of whom had already won Truman, Goldwater, Rhodes and Marshall scholarships."

The Clearwater native will receive \$2,500 and a trophy. He also was featured in Thursday's USA TODAY.

"It's a wonderful feeling to know people appreciate what you are doing for everyone else," O'Shea said. "I don't want to seem like I'm better than other people. I'm not about that kind of stuff."

"(Joe) has done great work at Florida State," said Tracey Wong Biggs, coordinator of the awards.

He was recently elected to be FSU's new student body president.

However, his most notable achievements have been in the community.

O'Shea chaired a coalition of students that campaigned at 10,000 homes to get a half-cent sales tax increase to pay for healthcare.

"We walked door to door and met with the community," O'Shea said. Though the group did not get the tax passed, "we moved the issue light years ahead. Everybody knows it's a problem. Now its how do we fix the problem?"

Last summer, O'Shea helped build the Lower Ninth Ward Clinic in post-Katrina New Orleans to provide preventive and primary care for 10,000 residents. He secured nearly \$100,000 in grants and contributions as well as \$200,000 in in-kind gifts of materials, labor and pharmaceuticals.

"He was contagiously zealous about the moral obligation he felt to continue our work in New Orleans and help the underrepresented," said Michelle Shin, director of Common Ground's Lower Ninth Ward Project. "I've seen young volunteers from around the country come to the Ninth Ward with lofty dreams of rebuilding the city after Katrina. I've never met one like Joe."

He has dedicated his life to public service since high school where he sat next to a quote that read "we had a moral obligation to lessen the sum of human misery," O'Shea said.

He's a bit of an idealist.

He wants to transform the world into "what it ought to be," he said.

Contact reporter Jennifer Jefferson at (850) 599-2243 or

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