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Laurier announces finalists for Outstanding Women of Laurier Award

WATERLOO — Wilfrid Laurier University has announced three finalists for the annual Outstanding Women of Laurier Award. The award will be presented at a luncheon March 21 at the Waterloo Inn Conference Hotel.

The Outstanding Women of Laurier (OWL) Award recognizes a female Laurier student who combines athletic and academic achievement with an active commitment to leadership and the development of young athletes through community teaching or coaching. The event has generated more than \$250,000 for women's athletic programs, scholarships and Laurier's mentor coaching program since it began in 2006.

Kelly VanderBeek, a three-time World Cup downhill skiing medalist and participant at the 2006 Winter Olympics, will deliver the keynote address. Daiene Vernile, anchor and producer of CTV Southwestern Ontario's current affairs program *Provincewide*, will host the event.

The finalists for the Outstanding Women of Laurier Award include (in alphabetical order):

Carmen Baker: Baker is a third-year Kinesiology and Physical Education major from Toronto who is the captain of Laurier's varsity women's rugby team. A CIS Academic All-Canadian in 2011, she is also the student coordinator of Laurier's aquatics facilities. In addition to being a competitive rugby player and her work in the athletics and recreation department, Baker is currently the coach of the Special Olympics swim team in Kitchener-Waterloo. This coaching role is among many she has held since the age of 16 in sports such as hockey, t-ball, softball and rugby.

Doreen Bonsu: Bonsu is a third-year History major from Oakville and a forward on Laurier's varsity basketball team. A starter in each of the past two seasons, she has twice earned Laurier's Female Athlete of the Week award. For the past two years, she has been in the OUA's top 10 for rebounding, and top 5 in the CIS for offensive rebounding. Bonsu's play is defined by her ability to be an excellent rebounder that has seen her finish in the top 10 in the country for offensive rebounding in each of the past two seasons. She is involved in coaching at a Titans Basketball Camp operated by her former high school, and at the Golden Hawk Basketball camps for girls in Waterloo. Outside of sport, she is a member of the club Laurier Students for Learning, which focuses on promoting children's literacy throughout Kitchener-Waterloo.

Fiona Lester: Lester is a fourth-year Biology and Math major from Peterborough and team captain of Laurier's varsity women's hockey team. She has twice been named an OUA First Team All-Star and three times a CIS Academic All-Canadian. In 2012, Lester was one of only two Canadian student-athletes to be named to the Capitol One Academic All-America College Division first team. She also earned the 2012 Luke Fusco Academic Athletic Achievement Award, which recognizes the female athlete who best combines academic and athletic achievement. In the summer, she works at the Laurier Girls Hockey Camp as a counselor and instructor. Lester has also worked as a supervisor with the Ontario Ranger Program at the Killarney Camp.

This year's OWL keynote speaker, Kelly VanderBeek, has enjoyed a racing career that began in 1991 at Chicopee Ski Club. A native of Kitchener, Ontario, VanderBeek's first taste of the world stage came at the World Junior Championships where she medalled in the Super G in both 2002 and 2003, earning bronze.

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She translated that success at the junior level to the senior stage where she introduced herself to the world at the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino, Italy with a fourth-place finish in the downhill, just three one-hundredths of a second from the podium.

Following her excellent showing in Torino, VanderBeek proceeded to win three world cup medals in the downhill between 2007 and 2009, including a pair of silver medals and a bronze medal, with the later coming at Lake Louise. In 2008, she finished the season fifth overall in the World Cup standings.

However, leading up to her second Winter Olympics appearance, VanderBeek suffered a serious knee injury that prevented her from competing at the Games. She would turn the disappointment into a new career path as she entered broadcasting and was a regular contributor during the Vancouver Olympics and has since become a guest broadcaster with Sportsnet, CBC and Sportscene.

The Outstanding Women of Laurier luncheon leadership sponsors include: RBC Royal Bank, M&M Meat Shops Ltd., and Miller Thomson LLP.

For more information about the Outstanding Women of Laurier luncheon, or to purchase tickets online, please visit www.laurierathletics.com/owl.