



## Jonathan PARKS

*program coordinator*

# High achiever and overcomer committed to helping others reach their full potential

By Steven Malik Shelton

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Doctors didn't give Jonathan Parks much of a chance when he suffered a stroke at the tender age of one and a half. Their prognosis was that he would never walk or talk fluently. And while many may have resigned themselves to this, Parks developed a strong resolve to go far beyond the expectations of the skeptics and the doomsayers.

While attending Communication and Media Arts High School in Detroit, Parks excelled as an athlete while sharpening his will to succeed and earned letters in track, cross country and basketball.

He also realized that he had a penchant for public speaking and expressing his ideas well. So much that friends and family suggested he become a church minister or a politician. But he did not want to pursue a career solely because he might be good at it. Whatever he chose would have to touch his heart.

Seeking to develop his skills, Parks enrolled at Oakland University and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Communication as well as a master's degree in public administration.

Not content to be an average or ordinary student, Parks took on extra responsibilities and gained respect as a leader and mentor. Some of his duties and accomplishments were president of the Student Congress, member of the Association of Black Students Executive Board and Residence Hall Council, AmeriCorps mentor and King-Chavez-Parks Program mentor.

Out of a class of over 2,100 students, Parks was chosen to receive the Human Relations Award which is given to the senior most recognized for improving race relations at the university.

Parks, feeling the need to help others to overcome obstacles and difficulties (and finding that when he helped others he was helped in return) became the program coordinator for GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness College Programs) for undergraduates at Oakland University. This gave him another chance to become involved in what he believes is his true calling — to inspire and motivate students as well as to provide opportunities for others to realize the potential for higher education.

Parks, now 27, remains enthusiastic about helping people and never misses an opportunity to teach by example whether in classrooms, lecture halls or in his normal everyday activities.

"No one is perfect," he said. "But you must practice because practice makes you better. That's what we all should be trying to achieve — simply getting better.

Jonathan Parks knows firsthand the immense challenges life throws in our paths. And few have had to overcome the types of trials and tribulations that he had to. But he realizes that stumbling blocks, with the right attitude, can be turned into stepping stones. In fact, adversity is the condition that has the greatest potential to build character, provided that the individual rises to the challenge and does not allow it to dominate him mentally and spiritually. He has used adversity to turn fire into fuel, and fuel into fire.

"It is my passion to share my experiences with the youth and future leaders of tomorrow," he said. "To ensure that they are products of their dreams and not just their environment."

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