

Dennis Williams to Receive Award of Merit from SWOSU

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Dennis Wiley Williams of Weatherford will be honored with an Award of Merit at Southwestern Oklahoma State University's Homecoming activities planned this Saturday, October 11, in Weatherford.

SWOSU President Randy Beutler will present the award at pre-game of the 5 p.m. football game in honor of Williams, who has worked nearly 35 years for the State of Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services in the Visual Services division.

Williams will also ride in the SWOSU Homecoming parade at 1:30 p.m. in Towne Centre of Weatherford.

Williams graduated from SWOSU in 1978 with a Bachelor's degree in psychology and started work for the state of Oklahoma in 1979. He still works for the department, providing many years of dedicated public service to the needs of people in western Oklahoma.

Williams' work with visual services is a natural for him. He was born in 1948 weighing only one pound/14 ounces, and it was a true miracle he survived. As a result of his premature arrival, Williams had retinopathy of prematurity. He is totally blind in his left eye and is legally blind in his right eye with very little vision at all.

At the age of five, Williams' parents made the decision to take him to the School for the Blind in Muskogee where he resided until he graduated high school. At the School for the Blind, he learned independent living skills, Braille and many other skills that have served him throughout his life. He was a member of the school's wrestling team and was academically successful as well.

Following high school graduation, he moved to Oklahoma City and went to work at the snack bar in the Federal Building. After a few years there, he decided he wanted something better out of life and moved to Weatherford in 1974 to attend Southwestern Oklahoma State University where he earned his degree. While in college, he was a member of the Psychology Club.

He has returned to SWOSU many times over the years to speak and teach others about aids and services available for those with disabilities. Williams never let his visual impairment get in the way of his goals.

Williams has made a significant contribution to society and has continued throughout his life to pay it forward. He has helped the university locate and utilize accommodations for disabled students. He has been an advocate for and taught students with visual disabilities how to navigate the campus. The majority of the mobility training required had to be after hours and on weekends. He even convinced family and friends to help him paint a crosswalk for a totally blind student to be able to get from his apartment across a busy street and to the campus.

Williams said he is proud of his alma mater and continually promotes SWOSU by displaying the special SWOSU vehicle tag on his family vehicle and recommending

SWOSU to potential students. He encouraged his daughter, Kennda Miller, to attend SWOSU to pursue her teaching degree. Despite her own learning disability, she earned her Bachelor's degree at SWOSU and has taught special education since 2001.

Over the years, Williams has participated in many SWOSU activities and events and has been active in the Weatherford community. He is a past member of the Lion's Club and served as president of the Weatherford Noon Lion's Club. He was the eye glass chairman for years, collecting used eye glasses to benefit others. He has worked on various chamber of commerce events and was a volunteer for several years at Ernie's Kendall House Teen Center. He was named volunteer of the year for Weatherford High School in 1996 and was named the State Rehabilitation Teacher of the Year in 2001 and 2014.

Public service has been Williams' life and his wife, Brenda, said he would not have been able to help so many people in Oklahoma if he had not first earned his degree from SWOSU. His achievements and success in his profession has made a significant contribution to Oklahoma and honors the legacy of excellence at SWOSU.