

**MELANIE MEROLA O'DONNELL MEMORIAL
SCHOLARSHIP FUND ANNOUNCES RECIPIENT**

Jillian Ruhland is Fund's First Recipient

SARATOGA SPRINGS, NY, June 8 – The Melanie Merola O'Donnell Memorial Scholarship Fund, Inc., announces that Jillian Ruhland, of South Wales, NY, is the first recipient of the Fund's annual scholarship. Ruhland graduated Le Moyne College in Syracuse, NY, Class of 2007. This fall she enrolls in the Greater Rochester Collaborative Master of Social Work Program.

The scholarship is awarded annually to the applicant who best demonstrates the commitment to assist communities in a manner consistent with Melanie Merola O'Donnell's values of compassion, generosity, respect, and honesty. Applicants are required to be enrolled in graduate level studies in the mental health field.

Ruhland received a bachelor of arts degree in criminology and crime and justice, with a minor in psychology. She is a recipient of numerous honors and awards, including Deans List, Alpha Phi Sigma National Criminal Justice Honor Society, Psi Chi National Psychology Honor Society, and Pi Gamma Mu International Social Sciences Honor Society. In addition to her academic background in psychology, Ruhland has worked with the County of Onondaga District Attorney's Office Victim Assistance Program, The Jenna Foundation for Non-Violence, and the Families of Murdered Victims Support Group.

“The board of the Melanie Merola O'Donnell Memorial Scholarship Fund is excited to award the inaugural scholarship to Jillian Ruhland,” said George O'Donnell, president of the fund. “We feel that Jillian shows a tremendous passion for helping people, much like my wife did. We're convinced that she's going to make a real impact on the lives of the people she touches, and we're thrilled to be able to support her in doing so.”

ABOUT MELANIE MEROLA O'DONNELL:

Melanie Merola O'Donnell died January 5, 2006, in Saratoga Springs, NY. She was 33 years old. Her friends and family created the scholarship fund to extend her legacy.

Melanie lived her life with honesty, passion, courage, humor and compassion. She strove to improve herself as she strove to improve others. She tried to maintain balance in her life – work, play, friends, family, giving, getting, teaching, and learning. She spoke for the principles she believed in with quiet, respectful determination.

Throughout her life, Melanie worked to help people in need and to better the world. She volunteered with and later became a staff member of the National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA) and a board member for eight years of the Capital Area Crisis Response Team (CACRT). She trained crisis responders for the organizations until 2004.

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Melanie coordinated the care of 28 crisis response teams in New York City and eight teams in Washington. She also aided crisis responders in Somerset County, PA, following the attacks. Melanie spent several weeks in New York City, helping grieving families who were visiting the site of the attacks and coping with the aftermath. She provided care to individuals affected by natural disasters, plane crashes, school violence, the civil war in Sierra Leone, workplace violence and homicide.

In June 2004, she was honored as the first recipient of the Melanie Merola O'Donnell Award for Excellence, given by the Capital Area Crisis Response Team.

Melanie played an instrumental role in improving her native community of Saratoga Springs, NY. She was influential in the creation of a community-based crisis response team and formed Saratoga Families, a support group for adoptive families.

At the time of her death, she was enrolled in a doctoral program in clinical psychology at Antioch University New England, in Keene, NH.

Amidst Melanie's professional responsibilities and accomplishments, her devotion to her husband, son, mother, father, sister, family and friends was never compromised.

The characteristics and compassion demonstrated by Melanie are ones that hold the promise of an exceptional mental health practitioner. These are the characteristics that the Fund hopes the scholarship recognizes and fosters.

ABOUT THE MELANIE MEROLA O'DONNELL MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP FUND, INC.:

The Fund was created with the principal purpose of extending Melanie Merola O'Donnell's legacy of helping others through caring and compassionate mental healthcare, with a particular focus on enhancing a sense of community. O'Donnell's family and friends have joined together to celebrate her life with this cause, hoping to identify others who share O'Donnell's commitment to helping those in need, and providing those individuals financial assistance for the pursuit of graduate degrees in a mental health field.

The Fund's primary fundraiser is a half-marathon and 5K run/walk in Saratoga Springs, NY. Over 450 people participated in last year's inaugural race, and more are expected in 2007 as the course is reconfigured. This year's race, on September 23, will loop throughout the historic resort city. For registration and sponsorship information, please visit www.mmoscholarship.com/activities.aspx.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

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