

# Remembering Drew



The 2011 Coast & Environment Graduate Organization annual crawfish boil continued a CEGO tradition—with a twist. The spring event benefited a scholarship in memory of a student whom the CEGO members never had the opportunity to meet.

Students learn a little bit about Drew Wilbert during the School of the Coast & Environment's annual awards program, where the Drew Wilbert Memorial Award is given to an undergraduate student.

Though the school did not have an undergraduate program when Wilbert started college, he established a strong connection there as Associate Professor John White's student worker. Wilbert helped graduate students by analyzing soil, sediment and water samples for microbial and nutrient activity. The students liked working with him, as they trusted the quality of his work.

White recalls, "He was bright, very affable. He was eager to learn. He wanted to know why they did things a certain way."

Wilbert passed away in March 2007, at just 21 years old. He was a photography hobbyist and a lover of nature who especially enjoyed camping in the woods and spending time along the Gulf Coast. In honor of his life, Drew's family partnered with the school to establish a memorial award.

A CEGO officer spoke to White about the scholarship, and the idea for a related fundraiser was borne. The school pitched in to underwrite the cost of food, enabling the students to request donations in lieu of selling tickets.

"We're very passionate about coming together for good causes," explains 2010-11 CEGO President Jenny Lentz.

White adds, "How can you not feel good about doing something like that?"

Ben Branoff, current CEGO president, sees the decision to honor Wilbert's life by supporting this award for undergraduate students as a perfect complement to CEGO's focus on service through community involvement.

Lentz agrees, stating, "Graduate students try to inspire undergrads to go into sciences."

In a letter to CEGO members after the crawfish boil, Dee Dee Wilbert, Drew's mother, shared, "Like Dr. White, I like to think that Drew would have been a graduate student with him in LSU's School of the Coast & Environment, and I also like to imagine that he would have been with you, one of you, in CEGO."

Lentz, Branoff and their peers gave life to that dream by celebrating Wilbert and continuing his legacy.

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Photos: Drew Wilbert's photo of a sailboat in Key West, Fla. (left to right) Drew enjoying the outdoors; Dee Dee and Larry Wilbert with Florence Louann Johnson, 2011 recipient of the Drew Wilbert Memorial Award; members of the LSU Coast & Environment Graduate Organization (CEGO)