

Rhodes scholarship propels student from Omaha to Oxford

BY KIM SWEET
Staff writer

Jennifer Gruber decided she wanted to be an astronaut when she was 8 years old.

The Omaha native, who attends Boston University in Massachusetts, may be on her way to achieving that goal after being chosen as one of 32 Rhodes scholars from across the nation Saturday.

The aerospace engineering major, who intends to enroll in a doctoral program in ion propulsion, had to fulfill a number of qualifications to receive the full-ride scholarship to Oxford

University in England.

Though academics were important, Gruber also had to prove that she had an interest in helping others.

This qualification wasn't difficult for Gruber to fill. While she was employed at NASA in Houston last year, she worked in inner-city schools talking to children about the space program.

Working with inner-city school children is something that Gruber is personally motivated to do. Growing up in a trailer park in Omaha, she said, she has witnessed the problems inner-city students experience.

"I saw some of the kids I grew up with participate in self-destructive

behavior," Gruber said.

Seeing students participate in this behavior motivated Gruber even more.

"I had the dream of being an astronaut," Gruber said. "I've always worked for that with the passions and talents I've been given."

Working with inner-city students isn't the only goal Gruber accomplished while working with NASA.

Software that she designed is used in the mission control center in Houston. It was used to perform a maneuver on the Russian space station Mir, she said. Gruber's father, Thomas, is not surprised at his daughter's successes. After watching his daughter grow up with an "Evel Knievel" atti-

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JENNIFER GRUBER
Rhodes scholar

tude, ready to do anything, Thomas Gruber said he always encouraged his children to go after their dreams.

"We tell them they can accomplish anything if they work hard enough at that particular thing," he said.

Jennifer Gruber decided to go to Boston University over a Nebraska

school because she admired BU's respected program in aerospace engineering, as well as the diverse population of its students.

But Gruber's loyalties will always lie in Nebraska, she said.

"I'm still a Husker fan - I will be for the rest of my life."

Clarke wants minorities to feel welcome at NU

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color must support the university to accomplish her goal of recruiting and retaining more minority and women faculty members and staff to the NU system.

"If you don't have a community to come to, you're not going to stay," she said.

One of the things that will help improve this community is education. Clarke has discovered that many people need to be enlightened on sensitivity and how to interact with minority populations.

An idea Clarke hopes will combat this problem is bringing in a group of speakers who are knowledgeable about the University of Nebraska system who could provide education to groups, whether they are faculty members, staff or students.

Linda Crump, director of UNL's affirmative action and diversity programs, said the addition of Clarke's office is one that is beneficial to the entire university system.

By being a voice to the central administration, Crump said, Clarke will be able to bring up diversity and equity issues the administration was not aware of.

The addition of a person to oversee the diversity efforts on all four campuses will help them share programs that are successful, Crump said.

Sharing ideas between campuses is something Clarke said she is excit-

ed about.

Each campus has used different means in accomplishing diversity. The University of Nebraska at Omaha has a program that tries to educate people on different attitudes people have about minority issues. The Medical Center has a program that tries to bring in women from under-represented minorities, Clarke said.

By collaborating, she said, all four campuses can benefit from one another.

John Harris, special assistant to the UNL vice chancellor for student affairs, said that having Clarke hold all the campuses accountable will be beneficial to the diversity cause.

"She brings the knowledge base that says you can pay now, or you can pay later," Harris said.

The commitment the administration has shown in starting initiatives from the top down, with Clarke, will also help diversity issues on the campuses of NU, he said.

With efforts like these, Clarke hopes the University of Nebraska will become more representative of Nebraska's population. Once this happens, students will be prepared to enter the world after graduation.

By not exposing students to situations involving people of color, Clarke said we are doing them a "dis-service."

"You are missing a major perspective, and you are not going to be prepared to live in a globally diverse society."



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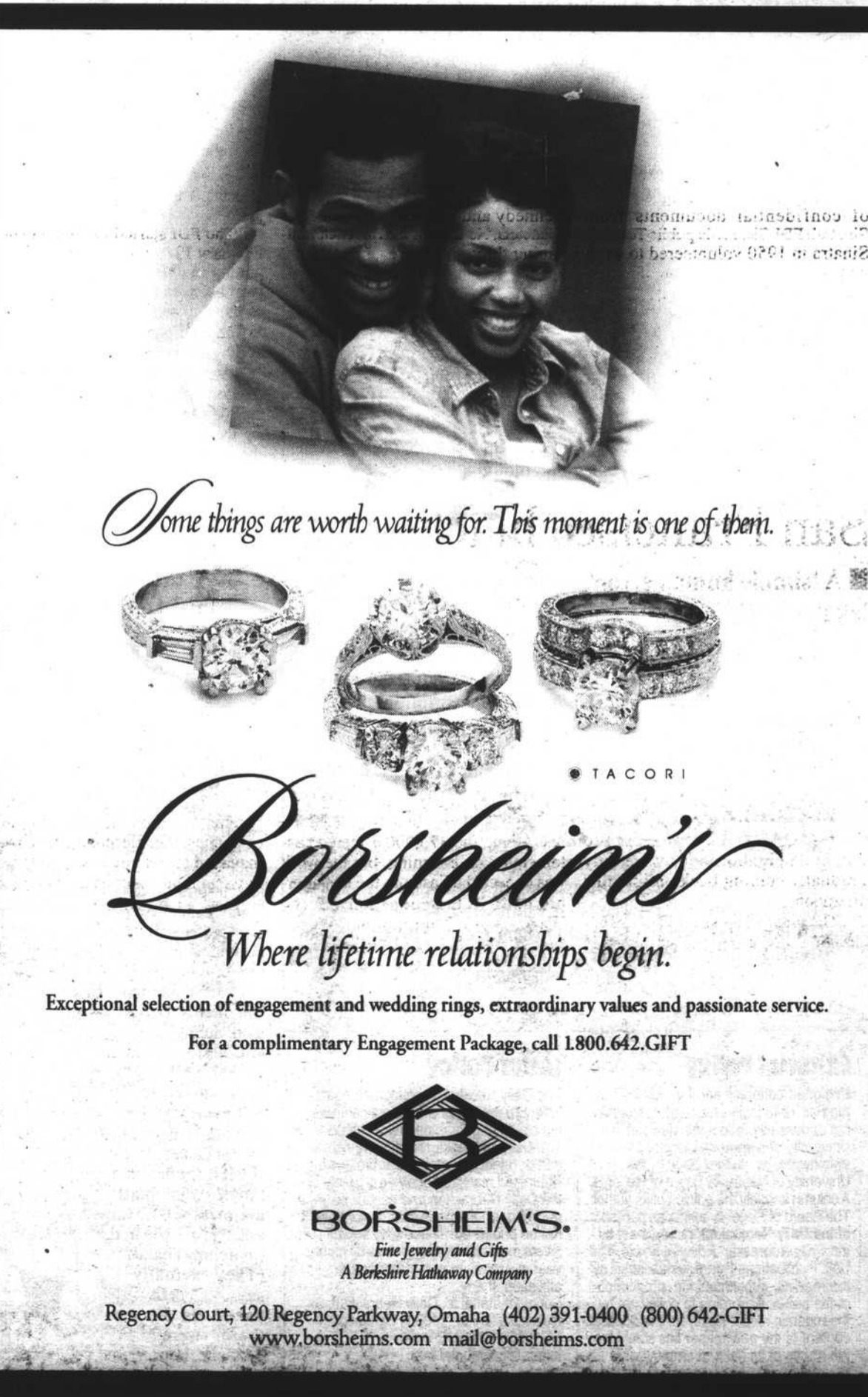
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