Woburn resident, aspiring international human rights lawyer

Kuong Ly of Boston College earns prestigious Truman Scholarship

CHESTNUT HILL - Boston College junior Kuong Ly, a resident of Woburn, Mass., who aspires to be an international human rights lawyer, has been named a 2007 Truman Scholar, the seventh BC student to win the coveted award in the past 10 years.

He is the only Massachusetts resident, and one of only 63 students across the U.S., selected by the Harry S. Truman Scholarship Foundation, from among 585 candidates nominated by 280 colleges and universities.

Winners of the Truman, an award given to college students seeking to attend graduate school in preparation for careers in government or elsewhere in public service, were selected on the basis of leadership potential, intellectual ability and likelihood of "making a difference."

The Scholars will receive their awards in a special ceremony at the Truman Library in Independence, Missouri, on May 20.

Ly is deeply involved in human rights issues, primarily protecting the rights of refugee populations, especially those who have been traumatized by their experiences fleeing from mass violence.

Ultimately, he would like to work with the Legal Assistance Centre of the United Nations, High Commissioner on Refugees, and plans to use his Truman scholarship -- which provides $30,000 for graduate study, as well as leadership training and special internship opportunities within the federal government -- to obtain a law degree as well as a Master's in human rights.

With the support of the fellowship, Ly volunteered with Never Again Rwanda, an organization that helps youth understand the roots of conflict and promotes conflict resolution and sustainable peace.

While in Africa, he helped put together a workshop about the broader history of genocide, using his knowledge not only of Cambodia but also other cases he has been researching: Armenia, the Holocaust, Bosnia, Darfur, and Sudan.

As an artist, Ly strongly believes that art can play an important role in helping to heal trauma. He is helping to develop a project in which Rwandan youth have a creative outlet -- poetry, drawings, and essays -- to express their feelings about the genocide.

Boston College Political Science Associate Professor Kenji Hayasaka, who nominated him for the Truman, deems Ly "tirelessly driven to help others."

The student has spent the current semester studying at Beijing University, as well as interning two days a week at the UN Development Fund for Women. He is working on a project that will include Chinese, especially those in the rural areas of China, about domestic violence.

He has conducted research with the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma, and is developing a guide in Khmer and English as a means to improve mental health resources for Cambodians in the United States and abroad.

He also has been active in neighborhood revitalization efforts in Boston's Chinatown community and in Lynn, Mass.

Ly said he owes "a lot of my success in winning the Truman Scholarship and other national fellowships to my Boston College professors, to wonderful individuals I work with at the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma and at the Asian Community Development Corporation, to my close friends and most importantly, my family."