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### **“Courageous Young Lady Receives Arthritis Scholarship”**

Erika Franklin was presented a \$2,000 Arthritis Research Institute (ARI) college scholarship at the second annual Arthritis Symposium at the scenic Hollow Creek Golf Club on Wednesday, May 16, 2007. Ms. Franklin was surprised by both of her parents and her sister who attended the award presentation. Dr. Wei shared her courageous story of living with arthritis with an audience of almost 200 people.

Erika wrote, “During the days that I could attend school, my mom would pick me up afterwards and I would be walking on the sides of my feet to try to relieve the pain. My mom would put bags of ice on my feet to try to make the swelling go down.” She continues, “We usually take trips to the beach in North Carolina every year for our summer vacation and that year was no exception. I remember how painful it was to try to climb down out of our van, my knees were so stiff and swollen, I had to sit on the floor of the van and then let my legs hang down to the ground. It has taken years and a lot of trials to find the right medication combination that works for me, but we did. Medications that work for most people with RA do not work for me, but I am now taking a new drug, Rituxan, that is able to help me.”

Erika concludes, “It has been hard and I live much differently now than I did before I had RA, but I have met wonderful people along the way and this disease has transformed me into what I have become today. I am grateful everyday to be able to walk, go to school, and be able to live my life with a minimal amount of pain.” Dr. Wei adds, “Ms. Franklin’s life is different than the life most young ladies live because of arthritis. But, her strong will to keep arthritis from taking over her life and her dreams is what has earned her this scholarship award. Ms. Franklin is also attending college to study nursing and plans to work with arthritis patients.”

The Arthritis Research Symposium featured five nationally recognized speakers and almost 20 community businesses. Comic relief was delivered by the talented, “Howard G”.

The Arthritis Research Institute is a non-profit organization that funds both conventional and alternative research, provides funding to arthritis patients who are unable to afford their arthritis medications, and donates scholarships to children who have been diagnosed with arthritis. For more information, please contact Michelle L. Grimm at 301-624-1164.

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