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GLIAC Announces Fall 2008 Commissioner's Award Recipients

Bay City, Mich. -- The Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (GLIAC) announced the Fall 2008 winners of the GLIAC Commissioner's Awards for Academic and Athletic Excellence. The awards, sponsored by Meijer, Incorporated, are presented after the Fall, Winter, and Spring athletic seasons to six male and six female student-athletes that excel both in the classroom and on the fields of play. The awards were announced in conjunction with the release of the GLIAC Fall All-Academic Teams in which 689 student-athletes were honored for their efforts.

The six female student-athletes to receive the Fall 2008 GLIAC Commissioner's Awards are: **Stephanie Booms** of Hillsdale College; **Kylen Cieslak** of Northwood University; **Jen Jung** of Michigan Technological University; **Kim Oberski** of Saginaw Valley State University; **Natalja Stanski** of Grand Valley State University; and **Katy Tafler** of Grand Valley State.

The six male student-athletes to receive the Fall 2008 GLIAC Commissioner's Awards are: **Nick Bellanco** of Ashland University; **Alex Gilde** of Grand Valley State; **Chris Hammer** of Grand Valley State; **Jake Visser** of Ferris State University; **Adi Vlad** of Tiffin University; and **Keith White** of Michigan Tech.

"These 12 student-athletes exemplify the NCAA Division II philosophy of balance between academics and athletics by excelling in both areas," stated GLIAC Commissioner Tom Brown. "Our conference, along with Meijer Incorporated, feel that it is important to recognize these hard working student-athletes for their outstanding performances in the classroom and on the field of play. The GLIAC would like to thank Meijer for their generous sponsorship of the 2008 Commissioner's Awards and for helping us acknowledge the exceptional accomplishments of this group."

The following are biographies of the Fall 2008 GLIAC Commissioner's Awards recipients:

Stephanie Booms helped lead Hillsdale College to 93 victories in her four years from 2005-08, the most wins in a four-year period in the program's history. She is Hillsdale's all-time leader in career assists with 4,640, and ranks in the career top 10 lists for total blocks and digs. She was named First-Team All-GLIAC three straight years (2006-08) and First-Team All-Region in 2006 and 2008. In the classroom, Booms is a biology major with an overall grade point average of 3.90 (4.0 scale). She's been named Academic All-GLIAC three times, and has been named the school's outstanding junior biology major and the winner of the Ora C. Kimball Award as Hillsdale's most outstanding female student-athlete.

Kylen Cieslak turned in a tremendous junior season in cross country, becoming the first runner in Northwood history to earn First Team All-GLIAC honors by placing second at the conference championships. She was the Timberwolves' top-finisher in all six events, earning two wins and three second place finishes overall. Cieslak led Northwood to the highest team finishes in program history at both the GLIAC Championships (fourth) and at the NCAA Regional Meet (fifth). Last spring, Cieslak became the first female athlete to earn All-American honors at Northwood in track and field since 1987. She maintains a 3.93 GPA (4.0 scale) in advertising.

Jen Jung is a four-time All-GLIAC selection, including a three-time first-team selection. After her senior season she was named an All-Region First Team selection and an All-American honorable mention pick after finishing third in the nation with 148 blocks. The Andover, Minnesota native finished her career with four school records: blocks in a career (569), block assists in a career (471), block assists in match (12) and blocks per set in a season (1.49). She has a 3.65 GPA (4.0 scale) in scientific and technical communication.

A pre-medicine major, **Kim Oberski** has maintained a 4.0 GPA (4.0 scale) in her academic career at Saginaw Valley State. A senior forward on the SVSU women's soccer team, she is a 2008 second team All-GLIAC honoree. She led the team in goals (12) and points (29) in 2008, and was tied for second with five assists. In her career, Oberski has accumulated

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33 goals and 20 assists. She has been named to the GLIAC All-Academic Team three times.

Natalja Stanski is the owner of a perfect 4.0 GPA (4.0 scale) while studying as a pre-medical technician. She anchored a Grand Valley State defense that finished the season with a 22-1 record and the top-ranked scoring defense in Division II (.217). The Lakers set a Division II record with 19 team shutouts on the season and ranked first in shutout percentage (.826). Stanski was named the GLIAC's Defensive Player of the Year and was a Daktronics, Inc. First Team All-American, as well as earning academic honors as an ESPN the Magazine College District Academic All-American.

A senior biomedical science major, **Katy Tafler** was recently honored with the prestigious NCAA Top VIII award. She has compiled a 3.91 GPA (4.0 scale) while leading the Lakers in goals and points during each of the last four seasons. She is a two-time Daktronics, Inc. Division II "Player of the Year", a three-time Daktronics, Inc. First Team All-American and a three-time NSCAA All-American. She was named the ESPN The Magazine Academic "All-American of the Year" following a season in which she scored 20 goals and added 13 assists for 53 points. She ranks third all-time in both goals (114) and points (269) in Division II history and is first in both GLIAC and GVSU annals in each category.

A redshirt junior, **Nick Bellanco** has starred for the Eagles in football and track and field. On the gridiron, he's a wide receiver who tied a school single-season record for receptions (72) in 2008. Bellanco was fourth in the GLIAC in receiving yards per game and sixth in receptions per game. He was named Second Team All-GLIAC. Bellanco led the Eagles in receptions and receiving yards (1,101), while playing a key role for an AU team that finished second in the GLIAC and advanced to the NCAA playoffs for the second straight year. A biochemistry/mathematics major with a 3.91 GPA (4.0 scale), Bellanco has been named to the GLIAC All-Academic Team three times.

Grand Valley State junior defensive lineman **Alex Gilde** was a key ingredient in the Lakers' capturing their fourth straight GLIAC football crown in 2008. Gilde recorded 30 total tackles, seven tackles for loss (-25yds.) and 3.5 QB sacks (-16yds.) during his junior season. Alex started eight games in 2008 and was part of a Laker defense that ranked fourth nationally in scoring defense (12.6 ppg) and 17th in total defense (278.9). Academically, Gilde has compiled a 3.95 GPA (4.0 scale) while in pre-medical studies. Gilde earned honorable mention All-GLIAC honors in 2008 and is a two-time Academic All-GLIAC honoree.

Chris Hammer is a repeat recipient of the GLIAC Commissioner's Award. A senior mathematics major, Hammer has put together a grade-point average of 3.75 (4.0 scale) at Grand Valley State. Hammer finished 44th in the 2008 Division II Cross Country Championships, crossing the finish line in 32:31 and helping GVSU to a fifth-place finish. Hammer was named the Midwest Region "Athlete of the Year" and the GLIAC "Runner of the Year" after winning the regional title with a time of 31:52 and bringing GVSU their seventh consecutive regional championship.

Majoring in mechanical engineering, **Keith White** maintained a 3.97 GPA (4.0 scale) and was named to the CoSIDA All-America First Team, as well as being named the top scholar athlete for football among Michigan's Division II institutions. The Rhinelander, Wisconsin native tallied 63 catches for 944 yards and eight touchdowns in 2008 to help Michigan Tech to an 8-3 record and third place finish in the GLIAC. He finished his career as the school record holder for career receiving yards with 2,377, while ranking second on Tech's all-time charts for receptions with 146 and receiving touchdowns with 22.

Tiffin University's **Adi Vlad**, a senior midfielder for the men's soccer team, posted a 4.0 GPA (4.0 scale) while majoring in information systems and starting 19 games for the Dragons, who finished 2008 with a 13-6 record and won the GLIAC Tournament Championship. Vlad, a native of Alba Lulia, Romania, was a CoSIDA First Team Academic All-District selection in 2008, posting the top GPA among the 12 First Team picks. Athletically, Vlad earned Second Team All-GLIAC honors in 2008, finishing second on the team with 6 goals and 2 assists for 14 points.

Jake Visser, who is a repeat recipient of the award as well, has earned a 3.89 GPA (4.0 scale) while majoring in history education. He has been named to the GLIAC All-Academic football team four times, is a three-time member of the GLIAC Football All Conference First Team, and is a two-time ESPN The Magazine Academic All-America First Team selection as selected by CoSIDA. Visser, a two-time (2007-08) Ferris State MVP, led the Bulldogs this season with 105 total tackles (56 solo), 16.0 tackles for loss (-71 yds.), and 7.5 sacks (-54 yds.). Visser was named the 2008 GLIAC McAvoy Award Winner, which is presented annually to the GLIAC football player who best combines outstanding character and leadership on the field, in the classroom, and in the community.