

A hush filled Hollingsworth Auditorium. Mascot Smokey in his sequined dress uniform stood still—balloons in hand. The crowd wondered which door to face. Then the shouts of “surprise” and applause enveloped the auditorium as Bill Gogar entered. Gogar is this year’s recipient of the University of Tennessee Volunteer Spirit Award. The award honors individuals or groups whose acts unselfishly benefit the University, who voluntarily performs beyond the normal job expectations, and is motivated simply by the accomplishments of the task. Bill Gogar embodies UT’s Volunteer Spirit. As one nominee wrote, “There’s nothing too lowly for him to accomplish and nothing too big for him to attempt.” That’s a sentiment echoed by many about Gogar who has been a building and grounds servicer at the UT College of Veterinary Medicine for the last 27 years.

Dr. Jack Britt, Vice President of the UT Institute of Agriculture, told the crowd gathered to congratulate Gogar that he doesn’t know anyone on the campus who is more loved than Gogar. “Bill, you certainly have a large family gathered here to recognize you with the Volunteer Spirit Award. The award is given by the university to recognize an outstanding person. Bill does everything and does it well. He is responsible for all the beauty of the college’s campus. Throughout the year it is immaculate. During any type of weather, rain, snow, or blazing heat, Bill is out there working and always doing his best.”

The grounds and gardens surrounding the college are the first glimpse of the veterinary college for most clients and visitors. Gogar is the person responsible for keeping that outdoor space beautiful. When the new main entrance on Joe Johnson Drive and Neyland Drive to the University is complete, Gogar’s work will have an even greater impact on the UT community. Gogar always has a kind word for everyone (and calls people by name) as he meticulously goes about his work. Not the type of person to count the minutes on the clock, Gogar doesn’t put his tools away at the stroke of 5pm. He finishes the task at hand. During one of last season’s snow storms, Gogar came in on a Saturday to spread salt before anyone called him.

Dr. Michael Blackwell, dean of the veterinary college, said a month doesn’t go by that someone doesn’t nominate Gogar for the college’s employee of the month award. “Bill is the true expression of love, compassion, and caring for others. He quietly goes about his work every day and the only reason you know he’s around is the fruit of his labors.”

When Dr. Leon Potgieter, Associate Dean of hospital operations, first decided to nominate Gogar for the award, he sent an email to faculty and staff and asked if anyone had anything to add to the nomination. The response was overwhelming. Emails came in from faculty and staff in every department. Potgieter has many stories to tell about Gogar, but one story in particular highlights his commitment to getting the job done. Potgieter said it was the only time he has ever had to correct Gogar. “Bill suffered a serious accident last year. He broke his leg. He fought with the doctor about coming back to work early and finally wore him down. The doctor said Bill could come back to work if his boss would promise to keep him off his leg,” Potgieter said. “I promised the doctor. On Bill’s first day back, I looked out and he was pushing a lawnmower with a crutch under one arm. I ran out to him and told him to stop—I had promised his doctor. Bill said, ‘I’ll do that, Dr. P.’ The next time I looked, there was Bill, on the riding lawnmower with his leg propped up.”

Gogar, a quiet man who doesn’t seek recognition, said the award was overwhelming and didn’t see why people had to make such a fuss. He brings the Volunteer Spirit Award to a personal level—one man’s contribution to an entire campus highlighted in a job well done. According to Potgieter, “If we all did our jobs as well as Bill, wouldn’t this be a wonderful place?”