The John W. Kuykendall Award for Community Service recognizes alumni who have provided extraordinary service to their community, demonstrating leadership through servanthood in the spirit of John W. Kuykendall, our 15th president. As Kristen Grady Milligan lived, worked and died, she exemplified the very best qualities of a servant-leader.

Kristen came to Davidson already steeped in a life of service. As a high school student, she conducted viola lessons for local musicians and spent significant time training puppies to be guide dogs, noting in her application to Davidson that she did so in the hopes of helping others.

At Davidson, she was an active member of the Davidson College symphony orchestra, the chamber group and Intervarsity Christian Fellowship. Following her graduation from Davidson with a degree in religion, Kristen earned a master’s degree in orientation and mobility at Florida State University, followed by a three-year apprenticeship at Leader Dogs for the Blind, where she trained a team of dogs and then instructed visually impaired and deaf-blind clients in their handling.

In 1995, Kristen married Deric Milligan, and their family soon grew with the births of their three children, Ashlea in 1998, Luke in 2000 and Rebecca in 2002. In 2003, on her 30th birthday, Kristen was diagnosed with a rare liver cancer. Over the next 10 years, despite her own illness and struggles through six surgeries, 22 months of chemotherapy and two rounds of radiation, she continued to find joy in reaching out to others. Perhaps her greatest legacy, apart from her children, was the establishment of Inheritance of Hope, a non-profit organization dedicated to serving families with young children who have a parent with a terminal illness. Inheritance of Hope provides retreats for ill parents, their children and their devoted caregivers, as well as literature, scholarships and counseling services for these families as they deal with the struggle and turmoil of serious illness. Kristen died on October 26, 2012, at the age of 39, but her legacy lives on.

In her application to Davidson, Kristen wrote, “I like to think of myself as an enduring optimist.” Throughout her too-short life she exemplified this spirit of hope and faith, illustrating the words of her favorite song, Amazing Grace: “Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail, And mortal life shall cease, I shall possess, within the veil, A life of joy and peace.”

Because she believed in the power of community; because she nurtured joy and hope when they were sometimes hard to find; because she led a life filled with humane instincts; because she provided her children with an enduring example of selfless commitment to others; and because she demonstrated leadership through servanthood at its very finest, the Davidson College Alumni Association is proud to present the John W. Kuykendall Award for Community Service in honor and memory of Kristen Grady Milligan, Class of 1995, on this day, June 6, 2015.