Students Clean Up Local Community

Service projects a special focus this year

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By: Danni Francis, reprinted with permission by The Student Movement

Nearly 100 students from Andrews University and Youth Build participated in last Friday’s Benton Harbor Park Cleanup community service project. The cleanup lasted four hours during the afternoon and volunteers enjoyed a pizza feed following the event. A similar Benton Harbor event occurred during the 2014–15 academic year, and plans to continue annually are in place.

“Last year, Bryan Tutton of the Benton Harbor Better Business Bureau reached out to see if Andrews students would be interested in helping the neighboring community with some cleanup projects,” says Emily Carlson, Andrews University Student Association (AUSA) co-sponsor and assistant director of Student Activities & Involvement. “It’s important to those living and working in downtown Benton Harbor to see this area returned to its previous cared-for state.”
This year Student Life and AUSA are emphasizing the importance of service, providing opportunities to participate in service projects and encouraging students to look for ways they can be involved in their communities in other ways.

“One of AUSA’s goals for this school year is to help create a culture of service, both on campus and off campus,” John Gonzalez, senior theology major and AUSA religious vice president, says. “We’re working on doing more events like this one as we strive to fulfill this vision.”

Student-led activities are prominent throughout campus.

“This event was planned by a group of students who were passionate about being the hands and feet of Jesus through service and who came together to make that happen,” says Jason Shockey, senior management major and AUSA president. “The goal of the event is to beautify some of the trash-filled public grounds of Benton Harbor and to help the people who live there feel proud of their city.”

Several students planned the project, with Merlique Blackwood, junior biology major, as one of the initiators of the project.

“I chose to be a part of this project because along with myself and many others, we have a passion for others just as Jesus Christ has a passion for us,” she says.

Reflecting on the impact of last year’s project, Blackwood said, “What was most exciting to me was that in the year prior the Andrews students cleaned up a massive landfill and it remained cleaned when we visited this time around. This showed me that residents of Benton Harbor want better and are open to the help of students like others and myself.”

University students understand the importance of impacting those in surrounding areas.

“If we are truly going to change the world, we need to change our communities first. This was a small way of achieving a big purpose. I believe students at Andrews University can make a change,” Gonzalez says. “We have a ton of students who just really want to get out into the community and help.”

John Gonzalez, Merari Gonzalez, Shockey, Blackwood and Moldovan were a few of the coordinators for this event. Others included Tara Thona, a sophomore class officer, and Evenny Milliner, a sophomore social work major.

“I’m passionate about contributing to a culture of service on our campus. I’m energized by the enthusiasm of these students for service,” says Carlson. “We’re planning on doing several service events this year.”

Students can look forward to future service opportunities or directly contact Emily Carlson at 269-471-6568 at the Student Life office, located in the Campus Center, for more information.
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