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Serving the Community

February 01, 2009 | Dominique McKay

Most full-time college students do not think waking up early to rake leaves or serve snacks to young children is an ideal way to spend a Saturday morning, but at Liberty University many students part with their warm beds to lend a helping hand in the community.

With 200 to 300 participants a week, Campus SERVE is a student-led initiative on a mission to bring Christ into the lives of the local community through service. According to Liberty alumnus and Campus SERVE director Kevin Mahan, the mission is two-fold: to meet the spiritual needs of the community while teaching students to make service to others a top priority.

Campus SERVE got its start seven years ago when Liberty alumnus Paul Atkinson had the idea to start a ministry that would emphasize more than just good works. Atkinson wanted to take the Gospel to the community.

“Campus SERVE never stops with just a service project,” Mahan said. “Campus SERVE has to go into a spiritual realm and say it’s not about us; it’s about this community having a right relationship with Jesus.”

Mahan said he first became involved with Campus SERVE after volunteering one spring and soon became a leader at one of the service sites. “I just fell in love with the city [of Lynchburg],” Mahan said. “We are the largest evangelical university in the country, and we can have a great influence on our community.”

Campus SERVE offers three different areas in which students can serve. The first and largest leg of the program has students going door-to-door in governmental housing projects. Students spend a few hours of playtime with the children there and then teach them Bible stories and serve snacks.

Junior Candace Davey volunteers every Saturday morning at the College Hill housing site. Majoring in Family and Consumer Sciences, Davey said she hopes what she does with Campus SERVE will prepare her for a future career in social work.

“The look on [the children’s] faces when they see us walking towards their houses to pick them up is nothing short of priceless,” Davey said. “It’s the highlight of my week.”

Campus SERVE also offers the second option of visiting nursing homes where students participate in art projects and sing old hymns with the residents.

“Usually by the second week of going you make a friend in the nursing home and you go back to visit them every Saturday,” said senior Liz Mizer, who spent a year volunteering with Campus SERVE. “You just learn about their lives and a lot of times they end up encouraging you instead of vice versa.”

The third and newest addition to the Campus SERVE agenda is known as the Helps service. Students go door-to-door asking if anyone needs help in house repairs, raking leaves, cleaning or any other daily chores.

Mahan said students are often confronted with “no’s” when going door-to-door, but they take their service one step further by asking if there is anything they can pray for — and they usually get positive responses.

“God is already working in these communities,” Mahan said. “We are not taking Him there; we are just responding to what He’s already doing.”

Many of the students in Campus SERVE do not limit their participation to Saturday mornings. They work to build an even stronger sense of community by bringing children to eat lunch on campus and taking them to church services on Sunday morning, in hopes of meeting their spiritual and physical needs.

Several Liberty groups work alongside Campus SERVE, such as Bridging the Gap (BTG), Liberty Flames Club and many of Liberty’s sports teams. This November, Liberty’s baseball team hosted a game for 53 of the children Campus SERVE works with every weekend.

“My lasting memory from that day is looking out into the outfield and seeing a lot of the baseball guys interacting with the kids,” Mahan said. “It was a joy to see so many of these kids get another day of their lives to just be a kid.”

Many people from the community also see the good works Campus SERVE is accomplishing and openly give back to the organization. Mahan said Campus SERVE received almost \$2,400 worth of materials from Food Lion.

But he said what he loved most about this donation was that it was kick-started by a Liberty student, Tyler McClure, who participated with Campus SERVE in the past and felt the need to give back.

“Food Lion gave the materials to his church, and his mom, who works with the children’s ministry there, knew about us through Tyler and she gave us \$2,400 worth of stuff she couldn’t use,” Mahan said.

Whether it is giving families turkeys for Thanksgiving or praying for their needs, he hopes Liberty students like Davey will walk away from their Campus SERVE experience with a genuine concern for the families they’ve served.

“These are not only children, but they are starving for Christ’s love and joy,” Davey said. “Knowing that I might be the only glimmer [of Christ] that their little eyes will ever see keeps me continually waking up at 9 a.m. on the only morning I have to sleep in.”