

Students spend spring break saving homes

by Shane Arman - Wednesday, March 18, 2009

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There's a group of 18 students that defines "getting away for spring break" differently.

The second-annual Alternative Spring Break group will travel to Biloxi, Miss., March 21 to 28 to help rebuild homes and revive hope for families affected by Hurricane Katrina.

"The goal of the trip is for students to experience a different culture, do significant volunteer work and learn more about themselves and others," said Mike Lueder, adviser for the trip.

Almost four years after Hurricane Katrina claimed more than 1,800 lives and caused \$80 billion in damage, recovery efforts continue.

"Lots of people have forgotten about Biloxi," student trip leader Ben Doing said. "There are still people who desperately need help."

Doing, a junior journalism major, filled out an application for the program after posters in Reeve Union piqued his interest.

"At first I was mildly interested," Doing said. "I didn't know if it was for me."

But after hearing student testimonials and realizing the trip would be a great leadership experience, Doing decided to apply for a trip leader position and was hired, along with Sarah Paff, a sophomore special education and elementary education major.

Trip leaders oversee other trip participants who are delegated responsibilities before, during and after the trip, including fundraising, education, history, reflection, entertainment and reorientation.

Each student involved in the trip is responsible for their specific area, giving everyone an opportunity to enhance their leadership and organization skills while volunteering for a meaningful cause. The areas of responsibility are:

- Fundraising — Students have sold grilled cheese, plastic containers, sent support letters to family and helped Taste of Nations during three lunch periods.
- Education — Students aim to educate the campus community about Alternative Spring Break and native foods, by creating PowerPoint presentations for the Taste of Nations events.
- History — Students will take photos in Biloxi, write blogs and record everything significant that occurs on the trip.

- Reflection — In Biloxi, students will form three separate groups to discuss their feelings about the environment and work they engage in.
- Entertainment — These students will plan dining, activities and trips around Mississippi, including a visit to New Orleans to speak with students from Tulane University about how Hurricane Katrina changed their lives.
- Reorientation — When students return they will share their stories with anyone interested and try to raise awareness about the benefits of Alternative Spring Break.

Lueder hopes to expand the program and eventually have multiple trips going throughout the year. He also wants to raise awareness about what the program entails and the satisfaction students get out of it.

“It’s a great opportunity to do something new and help people who really need it,” Doing said.

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