

Hamilton College students get early start helping the community

Sun, Sep 5, 2004, KARI INGERSOLL, Observer-Dispatch reporter



photo by HEATHER AINSWORTH / Observer-Dispatch photographer

Hamilton College senior Heng Ming Chan is reflected in a butterfly shaped mirror as she rolls paint onto a wall at the Children's Museum in Utica Saturday afternoon as part of "Make a Difference Day." The museum was just one location a number of Hamilton College students and faculty descended upon to perform community service activities.



by HEATHER AINSWORTH / Observer-Dispatch photographer

Hamilton College freshman Christine Yu pulls overgrown weeds as part of the landscaping duty Saturday behind the Children's Museum as part of "Make a Difference Day."

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CLINTON -- Get involved, stay involved.

This was the message the Hamilton College Action Volunteer Outreach Coalition hoped students would heed after spending their Saturday volunteering in the Utica area.

"It all starts with one event and builds from there," student director Haley Reibold said before the up to 250 student participants arrived at the campus events barn to take part in the annual Make a Difference Day.

Although the national event traditionally takes place in late October, Hamilton decided last year to sponsor their event the first weekend after classes began, Reibold said.

"This is the big event to jump-start the year," she said, noting how students often continue to serve the community on a steady basis throughout the semester.

Volunteers spent the day helping a variety of Utica area community groups, including the Neighborhood Center, Hope House and Utica Rescue Mission.

As she helped the volunteers get organized for their tasks at the Children's Museum, Executive Director Marlene Brown emphasized how the additional help is crucial to keeping the museum in tip-top shape.

"When they first came in, I told them that we couldn't do any of the things we do without their help," Brown said. "And we couldn't. Our biggest challenge is maintaining the building condition in addition to running our programs."

Meanwhile, upstairs on the fourth floor, freshman Cindy Liong and sophomore Christina Cheung wiped dirt and dust from desks.

"This is a nice way to meet new people", Liong said as she sprayed down the top of the surfaces. "And I like helping out."

In addition to Saturday's event, some students already have spent a week volunteering and getting to know the Utica community.

The Urban Service Experience (USE) is a pre-orientation program for incoming freshmen aimed at offering an inside look at the area and its opportunities, said Jeff McArn, faculty advisor and college chaplain. His own two children, Maddie, 10, and Theo, 2, anxiously waited for their day to begin.

While McArn was hoping for a large turnout of volunteers, he was more concerned with showing the students just how to get involved.

"Hopefully, today will spark a little interest in the community," he said. "From there, students can explore the opportunities available and stay involved."

Before heading over to the Children's Museum, freshmen Danielle Sclafani and Christina Yu, who took part in USE, spoke about the abundance of community spirit within the campus.

"The students actually genuinely care for the community and what happens in it," Yu said, speaking about the sincerity of her classmates.

"We all are here because we want to help," Sclafani said.

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MAKE A DIFFERENCE DAY - Plan a "Make a Difference Day" for Saturday, Oct. 23:

* Find a need -- learn who needs help in the community. Simply look around, ask neighbors and connect with civic, school and spiritual groups.

* Recruit volunteers -- Contact local non-profits that coordinate volunteers. Or call the Make a Difference Hotline 1-800-416-3824 for free help on recruiting.

* Plan and publicize -- Turn your idea into a blueprint at makeadiffernce.com. There you'll find planning guides and links to groups offering support and supplies.

Visit www.makeadifferenceday.com for more information. Source: USA WEEKEND