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Georgia Southern University Students Giving Back on Service-Learning Trips

MAY 11, 2009



Twenty-three Georgia Southern University students are starting their summer by giving back to others, through two service-learning trips sponsored by the University's Office of Student Leadership.

Nineteen students departed Sunday to spend a week in Kissimmee, Fla., working with Give Kids the World, an all-inclusive resort that grants children with terminal illnesses a chance to go to Disney World with their family. Meanwhile, four Georgia Southern students and two staff members are volunteering this week at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Boys and Girls Clubs in Cherokee, N.C.

"I believe that these alternative break trips offer students a unique opportunity to serve, to get to know other like-minded students from Georgia Southern, and to have fun. Each trip is unique in the service opportunities that it offers, but each one allows students to immerse themselves fully in service," said Diana Hensley, coordinator of civic engagement in the Office of Student Leadership.

The group in North Carolina is constructing and maintaining trails at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and doing maintenance projects at the Boys and Girls Clubs.

The students volunteering with Give Kids the World are interacting with children in activities such as serving meals, running the carousel and train and helping host the nightly party. They are also helping GKTW with projects such as landscaping, painting and cleaning.

Georgia Southern student Ross Davis participated in the 2008 Give Kids the World trip and is a leader for this year's GKTW trip. He described his experience last year as "a place [his] heart is truly endeared to," where "[his] heart was broken and yet filled at the same time."

"I saw the joy found in the eyes of a child even a child stricken with a life-threatening illness. I also saw the joy that came from parents seeing their children having their wish fulfilled, but I also saw the pain and difficulty that comes from such a catastrophic situation," Davis said. "I had numerous parents thank me for taking my time to volunteer with Give Kids the World, and yet I felt like I was the one that was being blessed and overjoyed with emotion. To know that what you are doing makes a difference in the life of another is the most amazing feeling in the world."

Alicia Bennet is also participating in the Give Kids the World trip for the second straight year.

"I hope the students gain an appreciation for service. The impact that a volunteer can make is like no other," Bennet said. "Additionally, I hope that students gain an appreciation for life. The children at the resort are so full of life. We tend to take life for granted, but these children and their families

cherish every moment. They are truly inspirational.”

Both groups are returning to Georgia Southern on Friday.

“It is my hope that every student who attends an alternative break trip returns to Georgia Southern with a renewed passion to give back,” Hensley said.

Georgia Southern University, a Carnegie Doctoral/Research University, offers 115 degree programs serving nearly 18,000 students. Through eight colleges, the University offers bachelors, masters and doctoral degree programs built on more than a century of academic achievement. The University, one of Georgia’s largest, is a top choice of Georgia’s HOPE scholars and is recognized for its student-centered approach to education. Visit: www.georgiasouthern.edu.