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Georgia Southern Students BUILD relationships, serve the community

AUGUST 3, 2015



Michelina Restaino helps bathe a horse at Heart of Dixie Equine Rescue Facility just outside of Statesboro.

More than 100 rising Georgia Southern freshmen made the trek to campus early, rolled up their sleeves and got their hands dirty in the Statesboro and Bulloch County community during the annual student volunteer program, BUILD.

Building Undergraduate Involvement in Leadership Development, or BUILD for short, is held at the end of each summer before fall semester begins. The Office of Student Leadership and Community Engagement (SLCE) hosts the program.

"If you ask [students], they say it's the opportunity to come and meet new friends," said Todd Deal, executive director for the Office. "But along with that the benefit, what they'll realize — as they're at Georgia Southern and in Statesboro, their new home — is they have connected with our community,

they've helped rebuild the community and there will be a time when they'll come back through and say, 'We started tearing down that house,' and there is a sense of pride that it gives them."

Blaine Bishop, a middle grades education major from Adairsville, Georgia, chose to participate with the program to not only meet new friends before coming to campus, but as a way to continue volunteerism, something he's passionate about.

"I've always done community service work in my hometown, so I thought what better way to come to Statesboro, which will be my home for next four years, and make an impact in the beginning," he said.



Student volunteers help clear an abandoned home to help the Downtown Statesboro Development Authority move forward with a renovation project.

Bishop was one of about eight students working with the Downtown Statesboro Development Authority to renovate an historic, abandoned home just off of South Main Street. Allen Muldrew, executive director of the Authority, said he is amazed with the positivity the students bring.

"The students are always a great team," he said. "They work hard and always have a great attitude; they're really ready to just jump right in. The kids come in here and put on gloves, clean out

buildings, help renovate and fix flooring or do landscape and trash pickup. It's good hard work every week, all day long."

Madi Pasterz, a multimedia communication major from Canton, Georgia, wasn't afraid of hard work and sweat to clear out the abandoned home.

"It's a lot more intense than I expected," she said with a laugh. "They told us we'd be going to a horse farm or working with kids. Then it's like, 'Surprise! You're demoing a house!' But it's really a lot of fun and it's challenging."

In addition to rising freshmen, students are accompanied by a BUILD leader: an upperclassmen student volunteer to help new students adjust. Jonathan Templeton, a junior marketing and logistics major, was keeping his team motivated while they removed trash and clutter from the home. "We're keeping the cool stuff," he said with a smile as he pointed to a poster portrait and a record.

Although passionate about volunteer work now, Templeton wasn't always interested in it. An alternative break trip through the SLCE, however, showed him the true value of helping others.

"Coming in as a freshman I didn't care about volunteer work or service or anything like that," he said. "But taking that trip — it really got me involved in school and in the community. So I kind of want to have that same impact on other people — hopefully get them motivated and more involved on campus, and help them become the leaders they can be on campus and in the community."

BUILD students also traveled to the Heart of Dixie Equine Rescue Center, an organization which rescues abused, neglected and unwanted horses. At the horse farm, located just outside of Statesboro, students helped build and repair fences, worked together to bathe horses and more. Julie Barnes, owner of the facility, said without the help of students like these, she would likely have to close.

"I was really thinking about closing before all of them came to help — it's pretty overwhelming," she said. "Since partnering with Georgia Southern, it's gone from me to being a private rescue to really having a life of its own." She added she will soon be an officially registered nonprofit organization.

"I just love it. I can't even explain it," she said. "All the kids that have come here, they all have done such a good job and been so helpful."

Even though it was hot and sweat beaded up on their foreheads, students smiled as they hosed down the 1,200-plus pound creatures to lend a helping hand. Michelina Restaino from Columbus, Georgia, plans to major in history, but first on her agenda as a college student is getting to know her community. She's volunteered for years in her hometown and was excited about the opportunity to continue volunteering as an Eagle.

“This is somewhere that I’ll be for a really long time — at least for the next four years — so I thought it would be a good opportunity to actually get into the community and to actually see the city how it is, the people who are going to be here and to meet people who are also ready to do stuff and make some kind of change.”

For more information on BUILD and other volunteer opportunities, visit <http://students.georgiasouthern.edu/LeadServe/build/>.