COMMUNITY-BUILDING LEADERSHIP SEMINAR TURNS 14

By Jordan Rowan Fannin

This fall, the Fitz Center celebrates its 14th year of students working with neighborhoods to achieve their desired futures as the Leadership in Building Communities seminar gets under way.

This year’s class includes 17 undergraduates from eight departments, as well as 13 public administration graduate students. While Fitz Center staff Dick Ferguson, Don Vermillion, and Brother Ray Fitz, S.M., continue to lead the seminar, professors Chris Duncan and Grant Neeley of UD’s political science department will also join the class as guest lecturers. Students in the seminar combine reading and classroom discussion with work outside the classroom in a Dayton neighborhood.

Each year, one neighborhood is selected to partner with the class on a visioning and planning project. Students tour the neighborhood, attend neighborhood association meetings, and meet with residents and neighborhood and business leaders to understand concerns and desires of residents and community stakeholders.

Central to the identity of LBC, this neighborhood project offers students a chance to work with citizens to develop a shared vision for their neighborhood, as well as to identify assets within the neighborhood and the community at large that will help them realize this vision. Invariably, one of the greatest assets is the network of relationships among neighbors, business owners, local officials, and the University of Dayton that is strengthened throughout this process.

Students in last year’s seminar worked with the Carillon neighborhood, and Mary Varnado, president of the Carillon Civic Council, believes the process was “very beneficial for the neighborhood,” especially the development of the Carillon Neighborhood Business Partnership among neighborhood businesses, residents, and local government. She noted that many of the neighbors were still discussing what they learned from the process at this year’s neighborhood picnic in September. This year, students will partner with the Wright-Dunbar, Wolf Creek and MacFarlane neighborhoods, and with Wright-Dunbar Inc. along the West Third Street corridor.

Above: Brother Ray Fitz, S.M., leads a seminar discussion of consensus organizing techniques.

Below: Seminar participants learn about the Wolf Creek neighborhood from the leaders helping to rebuild it.
GRADUATE COMMUNITY FELLOWS WORKING IN DAYTON

By Tim Shaffer

Four new graduate students at the University of Dayton have arrived on campus, as well as in the community. This semester, the Fitz Center and the graduate school have welcomed the first cohort of Graduate Community Fellows. Thomas Eggemeier, dean of the graduate school, envisioned funded graduate assistants making a difference in the greater Dayton community. He looked to the Fitz Center and its extensive array of programs enabling undergraduate students to get out and make a difference in the community. He didn’t see, however, a program geared specifically toward graduate students and their abilities. Thus, the Graduate Community Fellows program was born.

The initial cohort of Graduate Community Fellows is composed of four students — two pursuing degrees in clinical psychology, one pursuing a degree in school counseling, and one pursuing a degree in community counseling. While open to every master’s level program, the selection committee saw the right blend of academics and service in the four fellows. The fellows wanted an opportunity to attend graduate school while making a difference for others.

Each of the fellows receives a graduate assistantship just like those in departments on campus. The difference is that fellows spend their 20 hours per week in nonprofit agencies and not on campus. The four students were matched with partner agencies in the community, allowing both the nonprofit agencies and the students to find the right “fit.” And fit they have. Tierra Blackwell, a clinical psychology student, is working with Cityfolk. Terri Pelley, a clinical psychology student, is working with Daybreak. Jama Brown, a school counseling student, is working with Catholic Social Services of the Miami Valley. And finally, Katie Barnett, a community counseling student, is working with Life Essentials. The fellows will work in their respective agencies for the duration of their two-year programs, including the summer between academic years. This commitment has enabled the agencies to invest in the fellows since they are part of a team rather than just dropping in episodically. In exchange, the fellows have greater responsibility because of their sustained time with the partner agencies.

In addition to working in the community and attending graduate classes, the fellows are meeting regularly with Brother Ray Fitz, S.M., to reflect on their experiences. This is an essential piece of the Graduate Community Fellows program since it allows the students to connect their work in the community with their learning in the classroom, realizing they are both places of education.

As the fellows begin their time here at the University of Dayton, there is great excitement about what this opportunity will mean for them, future graduate students and the Dayton community.
PARTNER PROFILE: CITYFOLK

By Tim Shaffer

It started with a vision and a love for the arts and diversity. From there, Cityfolk has turned into Ohio’s only full-time, professional presenter of traditional and ethnic performing arts.

In 1980, some residents of Dayton’s Five Oaks neighborhood envisioned the first Cityfolk Folk Arts Series. It was a five-event series funded by a grant from the Ohio Arts Council and Ohio Humanities Council’s Joint Program in Folk Arts and Culture. The all-volunteer staff coordinated an Irish music concert, Greek dance workshop, Appalachian square dance, African drumming and dance workshop, and the creation of a mural in a neighborhood park. The grassroots effort attempted to bring together the cauldron of cultures that call Dayton home to showcase diversity in the arts.

The combination worked, and the organizers realized that the success of the first year pointed to an important need existing in the community — the need for the arts and creative expression of all of Dayton’s ethnic and cultural groups to be displayed in a professional manner.

From 1980 to today, Cityfolk has continued to expand its programming, reaching a diverse audience with ethnic and traditional music. In the fall of 2003, Cityfolk joined forces with the University of Dayton Arts Series to start the World Rhythms Series. This collaboration allows both organizations to share the wealth of traditions from around the world with the Dayton community through concerts and educational activities.

This semester has also marked a new relationship between Cityfolk and the University of Dayton’s Fitz Center because Cityfolk is serving as a partner agency with the newly established Graduate Community Fellows program. The Graduate Community Fellows program is a new initiative administered by the Fitz Center. It is generously funded through the graduate school because of the vision of Dean Tom Eggemeier to have funded graduate assistants working in the Dayton community. Tierra Blackwell, a Graduate Community Fellow studying clinical psychology, is working as a Culture Builds Community (CBC) program associate. This position will help expand the CBC program to three to five neighborhoods throughout Dayton, implementing a series of artist residencies in each of these neighborhoods.

The CBC program, with the help of Blackwell, will work with partner organizations and community volunteers to create cultural programs specific to the interests of each community. The beauty of the CBC program is that diverse communities will have the opportunity to learn more about their own histories, music and traditions. The hope is that this endeavor will allow all citizens, and especially youth, to tap into a part of their identity they may not know about or value.
A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

By Jana Strom

Learning outside the classroom was exemplified on Monday evening, Sept. 15, when amidst power outages in the city of Dayton and the UD neighborhood, 16 students representing a number of different races, religions and cultural backgrounds gathered in the Fitz Center to discuss diversity. The students who participated in the discussion were: current Semester of Service students Megan Brennan, psychology major serving at Dakota Center, Sarah Drakulich, international studies major serving at Daybreak, Carolyn Mingione, psychology major serving at Booth House, and Patrick Nelson, senior accounting and international business major serving at Adventure Central; SoS alumnae Whitney Dawson, Laura Burgess, Becky Greene, Dani Kusner and Karen Roth; Graduate Community Fellow and SoS alumna Jama Brown, serving at Catholic Social Services; women’s basketball players Ashley Brown, Aundrea Lindsey and Marie Rosche; and men’s basketball players Mickey Perry, Devin Searcy and Chris Wright. The discussion was facilitated by Beth Flach, academic coordinator for student-athletes, Jana Strom, coordinator of Semester of Service, and Brother Ed Zamierowski, S.M., senior community service advisor.

Students watched excerpts from the CNN special Black in America about education and single mothers, which catalyzed small and large group discussions on peer pressure, family, discrimination and the adaptability of minority populations in white-dominated higher education and professional worlds. Sophomore men’s basketball player Devin Searcy believes, “It’s very important to have meetings like we had . . . because it opens people’s eyes to what is actually going on in the world.” White and black students alike shared their stories, challenges, fears and successes. Jama Brown told the group that, “the evening] made [her] even more aware of [her] privileges as a white woman . . . It is never assumed I got into college solely to fill a quota. People don’t avoid me for fear of being robbed. The discussion confirmed my responsibility to be an advocate of change.” Beth Flach believes, “The cross collaboration of not only our departments, but our students, is significant to UD because it creates opportunities for us to learn and grow together. Peer conversations about important social issues are one of the best ways
for students to expand their views of culture, education and their place in the world.”

Flach and Strom met while participating in 2007-08 Leadership UD and decided to utilize one another’s resources — Flach’s student-athletes and Strom’s SoS students — to encourage diversity discussions in their corners of the UD world. They plan to continue and grow the conversation.

DAYTON CIVIC SCHOLARS BEGIN NEW ACADEMIC YEAR

By Alex Orlowski

Despite continued electricity blackouts from the remnants of Hurricane Ike, about 200 UD students, faculty, staff and community members packed the Kennedy Union east ballroom for the inaugural Celebrate Dayton Speaker Series hosted by the 2009 cohort of Dayton Civic Scholars on September 16. The Honorable AJ Wagner (D) and Speaker of the Ohio House of Representative Jon Husted (R) headlined the event, entitled How Does Civic Engagement Promote a Caring Community? Judge Wagner and Speaker Husted described their own experiences in public service and encouraged all attendees to become engaged in their communities. The evening concluded with the speakers jointly answering questions from the audience. The audience witnessed a civil conversation between two UD alumni with different political points of view.

The 2010 cohort continues to refine its capstone project. As its members begin their junior year, the cohort will meet weekly to further explore possible ideas surrounding mentoring programs in the Dayton area, among other potential projects.

The 2011 cohort members are excited to begin their first semester as Dayton Civic Scholars. While continuing to learn more about the city of Dayton, many 2011 cohort members are deeply involved in promoting Issue 52 — a $4.9 million operating levy for Dayton Public Schools that will provide services and resources to Dayton students, teachers and families.

Many DCS students are also spending the semester in public service internships around the country. Senior Monica DiGiandomenico is in Washington, D.C., at the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and scholars Grace Finn, Anne O’Connell, Katie Zehner, Casey Aldrich and Nicholas Pesola are all interning within Dayton’s Neighborhood School Centers. Scholars Allison Cone, Stephanie Zienkonko, Jocelyn Schieve and Grace Strzelczyk also hold internships at various agencies in the Dayton community this semester.
This August’s Rivers Institute float down the Great Miami River marks the fifth anniversary of the trip and the third as an orientation for River Stewards. Throughout the years, much of the trip has remained the same — the route down the river, the camping at Island MetroPark and the afternoon activities at RiverScape. Yet, each year the trip undoubtedly takes on a new flavor. This year, the weeklong immersion was marked by a new and exciting congeniality and cooperation between two cohorts of River Stewards. After a long day paddling down the river, both cohorts stayed up late into the night bonding around the campfire, dancing to guitar music and telling stories about each other’s quirks while being sure to keep an eye on the family of skunks lurking in the surrounding woods.

River Stewards from the Class of 2010 took on leadership roles for the trip by planning and leading several of the activities — including the hands-on macro-invertebrate sampling and the closing reflection. The new cohort of River Stewards excitedly took on the challenges presented by their colleagues and their mentors by having conversations, asking questions and sharing ideas. This orientation soundly kicked off the new school year. The River Stewards are continuing to meet weekly. They are learning more about the Great Miami River watershed, planning on-campus activities and taking advantage of the recreational opportunities in the river corridor.

The broader Rivers Institute is rapidly making progress on the strategic plan that was completed last February. The advisory group has agreed to revisit the previous structure of a steering board and form a more inclusive structure open to all members of the Rivers Institute, including faculty, staff, community partners and students. The necessity of this adjustment came more quickly than many of the Institute’s founding members expected. We are, as we like to say, just going with the flow.

The Institute continues to work on follow-up to the River Summit held last spring. A new web site was published (http://riversummit.udayton.edu). The goal of the web site is to facilitate continued discussion and serve as a virtual meeting place for working groups that have materialized as a result of the summit. The Miami Conservancy District is convening working groups to focus on three major areas of importance — economic development, private sector investment, and recreation and open space development. Community leaders in each of these areas are collaborating to “exploit” in the most positive sense the gifts that the rivers in this area bring.
RUSKIN SCHOOL BECOMES FIFTH NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL CENTER

By Lindsey Bungenstock

The Neighborhood School Centers project is pleased to welcome the newest school into the program, Ruskin. East End Community Services is the community partner of this new school, with Mario chosen as the new site coordinator. The principal selected for the school is Devon Berry. Ruskin School is unique in that East End Community School, a successful charter school, has folded its operation into the new Ruskin School. Part of this process includes site-based management through an advisory committee that includes two members of the Dayton Board of Education and community representatives.

Ruskin School is off to a great start as a neighborhood school with only 40 of its 420 students being bused. Also, Ruskin recently had more than 105 parents and children attend their Family Wellness Night. East End Community Services will be continuing its program Miracle Makers, which focuses on positive, fun learning experiences for students after school.

The other four Neighborhood School Centers are off to a successful year as well. There is a lot of excitement forming around the site of the new Edison School. The groundbreaking took place on Sept. 16, and the students, parents and community look forward to having a new community school building. Also, Nina Scroggins, Edison School site coordinator, has been working hard on tutoring and after-school clubs for this school year, including Edison’s community service club.

Kiser Site Coordinator Amber Rose has recently started an exciting new robotics program in which Kiser students can both play and learn about robots with UD students. Kiser’s partner agency, Salvation Army, had a very successful community festival in July with more than 800 community residents in attendance. Kiser School is also continuing its photography club, newspaper club and nature immersion club for this school year.

At Cleveland School, there is excitement around a new principal, Aaron Smith. As the former assistant principal at Fairview NSC, he is very supportive of the Neighborhood School Centers program. Cleveland Site Coordinator Kym Beasley has already had a very successful dads’ night with free food and fun activities for students and their fathers. Cleveland is continuing its after-school programs, including martial arts, zumba and a healthy lifestyles club.

Tashira Collier, Fairview School site coordinator, is excited to report the great turnout for the Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools program for five weeks this past June and July. Each day, there were about 90 participants. Fairview is continuing its ESL program this school year, along with its girls’ club. Adventure Central will also continue its nature-oriented fun and learning with the students at Fairview after school.

All of the NSC schools are starting intramural sports programs thanks to the support of the YMCA. In addition, the NSC schools were recently awarded a $20,000 grant from the Dayton Foundation for arts programming. This money will help the art teachers at each of the schools to buy much-needed art supplies for the students.
FITZ CENTER FACILITATES NEIGHBORHOOD EXPOSURE FOR INCOMING STUDENTS

By Alex Orlowski

While the majority of the incoming first-year class was busy spending the month of July double-checking housing assignments and dreaming of move-in day, more than 60 incoming students were already spending a week on campus with the Program for Christian Leadership’s Summer Workshop in Leadership and Vocation. During the summer workshop students have the opportunity to interact with upper class counselors and faculty while exploring UD’s Marianist heritage and immersing themselves in the UD motto of Learn. Lead. Serve.

The Fitz Center played an integral role in the workshop by facilitating neighborhood visits to the areas surrounding UD’s campus. Fitz Center Executive Director Dick Ferguson provided the students with an introduction to asset-based community development and helped them understand what to look for while they were out in the neighborhoods. Students then divided into four groups and had the opportunity to meet with leaders of 16 different community partners representing faith-based social services, neighborhood associations, youth programming activities and agencies serving the homeless. The goal of the visits was to familiarize students with the assets surrounding their new home and help them to begin thinking about possible volunteer service opportunities for their time at UD.

Fitz Center staff led the students in a reflection on their experiences and helped the students locate all of the community partners on a map of the city. Students were then treated to lunch at RiverScape MetroPark before spending the afternoon participating in community service activities at Holt Street Miracle Center and the Historic South Park Neighborhood.