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RUBICON HOUSE REVIVED

by Aaron Moores

After a year of uncertainty, the Rubicon House reopened its doors in fall 2008. The future of the house located at 1056 Brown St. had been uncertain due to loss of sponsorship funding. However, the house officially reopened its doors with a cookout that brought together all of the members of the Fitz Center team and served as an introduction to those unfamiliar with the project. The location of Rubicon House on Brown Street allows for its dual mission of serving both the University of Dayton and the neighboring communities. The house serves not only as a meeting space for several Fitz Center projects, but it also provides a variety of services for several neighborhoods and the Rubicon Park Business Association. Rebuilding Together Dayton is located here too.

The Rubicon Park district is also experiencing a reopening of sorts with several developments occurring and many more planned. The Fairgrounds Neighborhood saw an explosion of development nearly a decade ago with the Genesis Project that brought new life to the previously declining neighborhood. To complement the success of the original project, a second Genesis development project is planned with the intention of filling many of current vacant lots. A model at 29 Frank St. will be available in the spring to showcase the new pre-built homes which will be energy efficient and sustainable.

The theme of reopening has not been lost on the businesses of Rubicon Park. The fall saw new members joining the business association including the Down on Brown retail shop and the new owners of Jimmy John’s sandwiches. The former “West Mansion” is also under new management and has undergone a dramatic facelift in order to better match the surrounding businesses. In coordination with the Rubicon House, the Rubicon Park Business Association will be crafting a new brochure and web site this year to market the area to potential businesses.
A new school year has brought a new cohort of River Stewards, new energy and a new structure to the River Stewards Program. While many of the River Stewards' field trips and brainstorm sessions have involved both cohorts of River Stewards (Class of 2010 and Class of 2011) and both coordinators, the addition of the 2011 cohort has slightly altered the traditional mini-course structure. In addition to some collective activities, the cohorts have met separately for a number of experiences. This has given each cohort the opportunity for team building and has encouraged new leadership as many 2010 cohort members have been encouraged to lead group activities and act as mentors for their younger counterparts.

More River Stewards have also meant more and bigger activities. The annual River Awareness Week, the biggest River Stewards event of the semester, was held in September as a way to inform UD students about Dayton’s rivers and provide opportunities to experience the Great Miami River “up close and personal.” In addition to an information table in Humanities Plaza, river clean-up and kayak paddle, this year’s River Stewards also organized and led a bike trip for students along the Great Miami River. Other fall semester activities included volunteering at Five Rivers MetroParks’ Gearfest, presenting a kayak demonstration at Trotwood-Madison High School, visiting Sunwatch Ancient Indian Village, and enjoying recreational kayak paddles and bike trips.

This semester also looks to be one of challenges and changes for the Rivers Institute. River Stewards said “goodbye” and “good luck” to the River Institute’s co-coordinator Tim Shaffer as he graduated from UD’s Master’s in Public Administration program and began his doctorate at Cornell University. The Rivers Institute is currently accepting applications for a part-time coordinator position.

The Rivers Institute is continuing work on the second annual River Summit to be held again this spring. The goal of this year’s summit is to continue the conversation started last year that brought together representatives from nine cities along the Great Miami River to develop a regional strategy that looks at the river as an asset to cities, farmland, communities and individuals.

The River Stewards program will be enhanced in a special way this semester as River Stewards work hand-in-hand with members of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. A number of nontraditional students, ages 50 and up, will attend River Stewards mini-course sessions and engage in conversations and projects with the River Stewards from both cohorts.
Community Partner Profile

DUSTY HALL, MIAMI CONSERVANCY DISTRICT

by Emily Klein

For Dusty Hall, rivers have an uncanny ability to connect people and places in an undeniable way. Naturally, it is through rivers that he has come to be an integral partner of the Rivers Institute, the Fitz Center and the University of Dayton. As the program development manager of the Miami Conservancy District and the community partner director of the Rivers Institute, Dusty bridges the University and community elements of the Institute.

The core mission of the Miami Conservancy District is to provide flood protection within the Miami Valley. In addition, the district monitors the water quality of the Great Miami River Watershed, promotes water-based recreation and engages the community for the improvement of life in the region. Hall’s work has overflowed into each of these areas through his development of innovative water resources programs, experience as an avid paddler and fisherman, and work as a community leader. He sees opportunities in each of these avenues to repay the debt we all have to our planet.

The value of connecting science to societies and the use of natural sciences as a foundation for building community and environmental problem solving are at the heart of Hall’s inspiration for his work. In his work with the Rivers Institute, he sees its capacity to expand the tools available for communicating science to communities as a unique offering of the University of Dayton to this region. For him, it’s the integration of disciplines that are often “siloed” that motivates his desire to be a part of the Rivers Institute.

Hall has a unique history with experience in scientific research and government through which he has formed a distinctive perspective on environmental issues. UD’s River Stewards often mirror his diversity of interest through their study of engineering, music, German, environment and sustainability, business, biology, and art. Both Hall and the students have witnessed the strength of the connection of natural science, social science and artistic perspectives in creating change in our community. “It's almost too good to be true,” he says.

Above: Dusty Hall explains the dam system of the Miami Conservancy District during the River Stewards orientation.

Below: Dusty Hall (second from right) and his wife, Sarah Hippensteel, and daughter, Emma (bottom right), celebrate a successful 17-mile kayak trip down the Great Miami with River Stewards.
DAYTON CIVIC SCHOLARS ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE
by Linda Potyrala

Dayton Civic Scholars are deep into the school year with continuing internships, volunteering, listening to speakers on campus and reflecting on those experiences. Here are one scholar’s activities, typical of the busy campus life they lead.

DCS Cohort 2011 member Laura Getz reflected on issues regarding Latino Americans and Mexico. Early last semester, she heard Charles Garcia speak on how to “Apply the Secrets of Great Leaders.” Garcia — one of Hispanic Today magazine’s 100 most influential Hispanics in the U.S. — was the only Hispanic appointed to the Florida State Board of Education by Gov. Jeb Bush. Garcia spoke to the audience in Kennedy Union about people who had never given up on dreams for equality. He told about how he had to stand up for what he believed in, even in opposition to the governor and the president.

Getz found his speech inspirational: “I think it is good to take (Mr. Garcia’s) advice because it reinforces and supports what we believe in and what we are trying to do for the city of Dayton.” Later in the semester, Getz reflected on actions taken by the Amnesty International meeting, of which she is a member on campus. At a meeting in October, Getz reports, “We wrote to the procurador in Mexico and demanded that the Mexican government start abiding by the Declaration of Human Rights. I am very interested in human rights issues and would one day like to work for an organization similar to Amnesty International. I am gaining great experience and learning a lot at our meetings.”

Several Dayton Civic Scholars volunteered to help on the Dayton Public Schools levy campaign. Laura Getz, Katie Stretch, Natasha Carlsen and Nastacia Moore were active in the phone banks held downtown at the levy headquarters. Katie Zehner, Casey Aldrich, Nick Pesola and Anne O’Connell handed out campaign literature in the district’s Trunk or Treat activities before Halloween. At Trunk or Treat, neighbors and friends who want to pass out candy to school children gather in one location outdoors, usually near school grounds. Senior Grace Finn was trained in the talking points of the campaign to be able to speak to community groups to assist in passing the levy.

Dayton Civic Scholars Getz, Moore, Stretch, Sarah Hrabik and Dani Hosfield attended the first Dayton Neighborhood Conference in downtown Dayton at the Convention Center. It included several organizations speaking on “The Power of One: Reaching out to Your Neighbor” and “How to be a Shape Shifter” to bring positive change to the community. They also heard from the daytoncreate.org organization, which includes five parts aimed at specific demographics to promote business and the arts in downtown Dayton: UpDayton, This is Dayton, Creative Incubator, Innovation Collaborative and Film Dayton. Getz writes, “I thought the conference was really interesting and there are a lot of great ideas and cool programs in the city.”
STUDENT REFLECTIONS ON SERVICE

by Brother Ed Zamierowski, S.M.

The following are excerpts from fall 2008 students’ exit interviews.

“This experience was more than I ever could have anticipated and it truly changed me. I feel different in many ways and I have much new appreciation for people. I feel much more aware of what is going on outside of our bubble. I am much more passionate about social justice issues because I have seen things firsthand and how these issues directly affect deserving people. I am happy that I took advantage of this opportunity and it has been a unique and irreplaceable experience. I think this experience has truly prepared me for my future more than any class could ever have.” (Booth House)

“I learned a lot about social work, how a successful organization operates, and that everyone seeks some kind of stability or structure. I’ve learned how to be professional. I learned about how to work with people, rather than for them, and that I don’t just do favors all the time, that my services are for real. I’d say the most difficult aspect of my SOS experience was connecting with people about work.” (Daybreak)

“I was able to build strong relationships with the kids. I learned their personalities, tendencies, strengths and weaknesses. Building relationships through part-time service takes a long time and usually it is not this profound. Learning deeply about the kids enabled me to help them and the center more effectively. I learned that I am able to work in a situation in which things can change from one day to the next and being able to take initiative and be flexible is a key part to success. I plan to go to graduate school in school psychology. Working at the Dakota Center increased my desire to enter this field, because I was able to directly see how my help is needed.” (Dakota Center)

Junior Tim Renner and seniors Erin Sylvester, Eric Cady and Karen Roth began their spring 2009 Semester of Service orientation experience with an overnight at Governor’s Island and ended with a luncheon with SOS staff and site supervisors. At time of writing, they completed a first week of service at Dakota Center (Tim), Adventure Central (Karen), Booth House (Erin), and Dayton Christian Center (Eric). Karen Roth is starting a second Semester of Service, after serving at Dakota Center a year ago.

Left: Picture from spring 2009 Orientation shows, from left to right, Karen Roth, Tim Renner, Erin Sylvester and Eric Cady.
On the night of Nov. 4, 2008, the Dayton Public Schools levy passed with a 57 percent favorable vote. This was a crucial victory for Dayton Public Schools and for the whole Dayton community.

The Neighborhood School Centers had a large role in the passage of this levy. The campaign manager, Bill Burges, often referred to the NSC program as an “insurance policy” for the levy campaign. He believed that special, focused effort should be put into these schools and their surrounding neighborhoods since these communities already had a strong connection with their local DPS schools. The first major project for levy activity was designing and sending out a mailing to all of the parents of the students in the five NSC schools. This mailing included a voter registration card, an absentee ballot request application, an informational sheet about Issue 52 and a volunteer form.

NSC site coordinators promoted the levy at their events — both large and small. The site coordinators became trained levy speakers. There were also crucial media opportunities arranged at some of the larger events at the NSC schools. For instance, Superintendent Dr. Kurt Stanic, school board members and city of Dayton commissioners participated in the NSC Safe Routes to School Day walks at Ruskin and Kiser schools. Dr. Stanic held a press conference discussing the importance of community schools and passing the levy. Also, there were levy efforts at the Halloween events at Kiser and Cleveland. These schools had tables set up with Issue 52 face painting and stickers. There was also press coverage of these events.

Additionally, site coordinators spent hours walking door-to-door in the NSC neighborhoods distributing literature and talking with the residents. They attended neighborhood association meetings and recruited teachers and parents to make phone calls to voters to encourage them to vote for Issue 52. They put signs up in business windows, earned endorsements from business owners and placed literature on store counters. At Fairview, there were strong fundraising efforts, which included a levy tree with ribbons to raise money from the teachers and students. Finally, there were several UD NSC student volunteers and interns that spent all of Nov. 4 at polling locations distributing literature and talking to voters about Issue 52 as they prepared to cast their ballots.

The success of the levy is already showing great effects in the Dayton Public Schools through smaller class sizes, the elimination of all mixed grade-level classrooms, and the reinstatement of athletics and other after school activities.
‘OH THE PLACES YOU’LL GO’
CHECKING IN ON FITZ CENTER ALUMNI IN COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP
by Alex Orlowski

The Fitz Center has had many graduate assistants and undergraduate student interns who have since graduated and moved on. We caught up with eight of them.

Anne Crecelius was a co-founder of the Rivers Institute before graduating in 2007. She is now at Colorado State University-Fort Collins working on her MS in cardiovascular physiology. After graduating this upcoming May, she hopes to stay at CSU to pursue her Ph.D. and become a university researcher and professor. Crecelius appreciates all of her role models at the Fitz Center who supported her efforts to find greater meaning in her choice of vocation.

Kate Ervin helped begin Dayton’s Neighborhood School Centers program before receiving her MPA from UD in 2006. She is now with the city of Dayton Department of Planning and Community Development and continues to volunteer with arts-related groups. She plans to remain within Dayton and is excited that her current career allows her to stay connected with the Fitz Center. Ervin is working to secure funding for Safe Routes to School and is a partner of the Neighborhood School Centers team.

Erin Fuller was the multitasking graduate assistant working with the Dayton Civic Scholars, the Leadership in Building Communities seminar and the Neighborhood School Centers before graduating with her MPA in 2008. She is now a legislative aide in the Dayton City Commission Office working with Commissioners Matt Joseph and Nan Whaley. Fuller wants to continue her career in Dayton, her hometown, and misses everyone in the Fitz Center.

Kelly (Link) Geers was a project assistant to Brother Ray Fitz, S.M., before receiving her MPA in 2006. She is now with the Dayton Development Coalition working on defense-related projects and advocates for the region on the state and federal levels. She thoroughly enjoys her career and is open to future possibilities.

Dani Kusner worked with the Semester of Service program and service-learning initiatives before graduating from UD in 2007. She is now in St. Louis working at Gateway Greening, a nonprofit organization serving community gardens throughout the city. Kusner holds an AmeriCorps*VISTA position helping rural farmers distribute their produce within inner-city St. Louis. Kusner plans to focus her career in community development and urban agriculture. She says that the Fitz Center’s emphasis on relationships in community building continues to influence and guide her efforts.

Jessica (Gruenke) Saunders graduated in 2003 with her MPA and was involved in Kids Voting, the National Conference for Community and Justice Anytown Camp, and Leadership in Building Communities, and initiated the first Fitz Center newsletter. She is now with the marketing department of the Children’s Medical Center in charge of community outreach and advocacy, and is also the coordinator of Safe Kids Greater Dayton. Saunders plans to stay in the Dayton area and is excited to see all of the wonderful things the Fitz Center is doing within the community.

Stacy (Wall) Schweikhart was with the Fitz Center from its beginning (1997-2001) and served as a liaison with community organizations and institutions. Her projects included the opening of Rubicon House and the Genesis Project. She is now a division manager in the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts Department of the city of Kettering and is an adjunct faculty member in UD’s MPA program. Schweikhart was recently appointed the Ohio Region Chair for the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association. She and her husband, Mark, have two children, Jake and Quinn, and are looking forward to raising lifelong Flyer fans.

Timothy Shaffer graduated with his MPA in December. Shaffer was co-leader of the Rivers Institute and initiated the Graduate Community Fellows program. He is now at Cornell University pursuing his Ph.D. in education while working on research to foster deliberative dialogue and civic engagement and promote the connection between universities and their communities. Eventually, he would like to pursue a vocation in academia and thanks the Fitz Center for showing him the positive role universities can have in their communities.
The research branch of the Fitz Center is evaluating the impact of a federally funded program offering supportive services to young adolescents who have come into contact with Montgomery County’s child protective services agency. This program is offered through Miami Valley Catholic Social Services and is expected to touch hundreds of high-risk young people during the next five years. In addition, plans are being finalized for the evaluation of a five-year abstinence education project presented to thousands of students throughout the region by staff of Elizabeth’s New Life Center. Funded by the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, this program will provide information about the most effective ways to present this information to young audiences.

The evaluation of a multifaceted, relationship-based counseling and education program for young mothers and fathers in the area is also under way. Through this program, the staff of Miami Valley Catholic Social Services hopes to aid some of the area’s most fragile families with parenting information, skills and support.

The evaluation and monitoring of the Neighborhood School Centers activities is another of the research division’s projects. This work will hopefully provide an accurate description of the ongoing efforts of the site coordinators and ultimately allow for a clear understanding of the impact of the project on the students, the schools and their neighborhoods.

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