AMERICORPS RETURNS TO UD
BY DICK FERGUSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Greater Dayton and Montgomery County have a significant population of vulnerable youth (16-24) who experience one or more of the following: aging out of foster care, transitioning out of the juvenile justice system, mental illness or disabilities, and homelessness. Many are in transitional living situations, are unemployed or underemployed, undereducated, and have limited opportunities to take part in activities that promote long-term self-sufficiency.

Beginning this fall, 25 University of Dayton students and seven youth of Daybreak will become AmeriCorps members tasked with working to change these realities. The Fitz Center, together with partners from Daybreak, St. Vincent de Paul men’s and women’s homeless shelters, and Homefull, will operate the second AmeriCorps program to be awarded to UD. The other was SWEAT, Serve with Energy and Talent, that was active from 1994 until 2001.

The AmeriCorps members will provide help with tutoring and GED completion, guidance in applying for and enrolling in college, skills related to employability and job retention, personal finance, and self-care that supports health, wellness, and positive social outcomes. The Corporation for National and Community Service will invest $137,217 in the first year to provide grant awards ranging from $1,200 to $12,100 to participants who will serve between 300 hours and 1700 hours during the year. The University of Dayton, through the College of Arts and Sciences, will provide $57,042 in direct and in-kind support. The Fitz Center will manage the federal grant with support of three teams of staff and faculty and program supervisors from the partner organizations.

Linda Kramer, chief executive officer of Daybreak, summed up the shared vision of the grant team: “Our ultimate goal is to break the cycles of poverty and homelessness and create self-sufficient, responsible citizens in our community.”

Teams of UD staff and faculty are working with program supervisors from Dayton area homeless agencies to plan an AmeriCorps program that envisions UD students and homeless youth working side by side. The Youth Economic Self-Sufficiency (YESS) program will begin Sept. 1.
There has been a multitude of incredibly motivated students involved in Fitz Center programs, past and present, and all are affected by the mission of the Fitz Center. No one who walks away from the Fitz Center leaves empty-handed. In fact, there are many who have taken what they have learned and applied it to their careers. The larger community is being touched by the Fitz Center mission through the lives of our alumni/nae in their careers for the common good. The following graduates have seen a need in their communities and are using their skills to do something about it.

**Joshua Rauch ’08** was part of the very first class of Dayton Civic Scholars and is now the deputy economic development administrator at GovDesign. This organization works with local governments and nonprofits to stay up-to-date with modern business standards. Josh’s main job is to build relationships with the city and businesses, especially big employers, to identify what the biggest obstacles are in the city and how to overcome them. Josh claims the Fitz Center has influenced his career by giving him the tools to make an impact on a local level; moreover, it has helped him discover his vocation.

**Kelly Geers ’04** is the district director in the Office of Congressman Mike Turner. She is the “eyes and ears of the community,” working as a bridge between the legislative staff and the Dayton community. When political decisions are being made, the needs of the community are known because of her efforts. The Fitz Center was the foundation for Kelly to learn and become a productive part of the community. While at the Fitz Center, she was a research assistant for Brother Ray Fitz, S.M., where she learned about Dayton in both a political and a cultural sense, influencing her current employment.

**Maggie Varga ’10** is a director at the Southwestern Ohio Council for Higher Education (SOCHE). This organization works with colleges and universities in the area, and Maggie works specifically with the internship program. She collaborates with businesses to aid qualified students in finding jobs. Students are hired through SOCHE to alleviate duties from the businesses. While at the Fitz Center, Maggie was in the first graduating class of River Stewards and later served as graduate assistant and interim director of the Rivers Institute. The Fitz Center has taught her to listen in order to connect with the community and understand its needs and assets.

**Katie Norris ’10** has really taken what she learned as a River Steward to heart. Katie is an environmental
scientist for the City of Dayton Department of Water, Division of Environmental Management. Here she monitors storm water quality, does education and outreach on the water systems, and works to make sure organizations are complying with storm water regulations. Katie has continued the mission of the Fitz Center by identifying a community’s assets and making progress toward positive change. Her work directly affects the community as she strives to protect Dayton’s rivers and aquifer for the good of all citizens.

Tim Shaffer ’06 is director of the Center for Leadership and Engagement at Wagner College in Staten Island, N.Y. The work he performs is very similar to the work he once did at the Fitz Center; he strives to bridge the gap between the college and a community that is very similar to Dayton. His program works on long-term partnerships with the surrounding community, not just short-term, temporary relationships. While at the Fitz Center, Tim was a graduate assistant leading the Rivers Institute and the Graduate Community Fellows Program, both affecting his career in a substantial and positive way. Tim later earned his doctorate from Cornell University.

Ariel Walker ’04 works as the senior policy aide to Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley. Here she manages all of the programming with the mayor and directly affects the Dayton community by focusing on priorities in the city. While at the Fitz Center she was a graduate assistant and was part of the team that developed the Dayton Civic Scholars program. She later completed a Master of Public Administration degree at Wright State University. Ariel definitely made an impact on the Fitz Center through her dedicated servant leadership and brought that commitment to service to the entire city of Dayton.

No one who walks away from the Fitz Center leaves empty-handed.

All of these alumni/nae are reaching the larger community. They see a need and are using their skills and the resources of the community to understand the issues and make a change. The Fitz Center family has definitely moved beyond the walls of the University and even outside the city of Dayton with these dedicated alumni. The impact they have made both on the Fitz Center and their local communities is remarkable and exemplary. All of these individuals are deeply committed and will continue to use their skills and knowledge for the common good. They are leaders who build and sustain communities.
FACULTY PROFILE: JANA BENNETT

Jana Bennett is an associate professor of religious studies in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Dayton, where she teaches classes on Christian ethics and healthcare ethics as well as oversees the Ethics in Action Living Learning Community (LLC).

As a faculty member, Jana feels she must foster students’ academic, professional and personal growth. Traditional learning in the form of textbooks and lectures stimulates academic growth but often fails to stimulate professional and personal growth; whereas, non-traditional learning in the form of community engagement stimulates all three. Meaning, ethics are not black or white. It is a messy shade of gray, and students start to understand that when they put down their books and get out of the classroom. In other words, students can examine ethics in the classroom but can also experience ethics in the world. For that reason, Jana’s courses make use of traditional learning as well as non-traditional learning experiences.

To make use of nontraditional learning, Jana said she often collaborates with the Community Engaged Learning (CEL) team of the Fitz Center for Leadership in Community: “By working with the CEL team, I have been able to improve my course syllabus and class assignments. I have been better able to lead discussions and prompt meaningful reflections and have had an easier time scheduling off-campus visits and on-campus guest speakers.” Jana has been able to make connections with community partners for the purpose of reciprocally engaging with the Dayton community.

In addition to fostering students’ growth, community engagement fosters Jana’s growth. “It isn’t easy,” she says. “There have been several challenges that have needed to be resolved and changes that have needed to be made, but each year I am getting better and each year the benefits are getting bigger.”

More importantly, Jana is able to build relationships with her students because community engaged learning calls for small group discussion rather than large group instruction. “Students are more willing to share the connections they make between ethics ‘in theory’ and ethics in the ‘real-world’ when they are in small groups rather than a large class. By them sharing their experiences, I get to know them better and get to hear their growth.”

Overall, Jana, with help from the Fitz Center’s CEL team, has been able to initiate and sustain a commitment to community engagement for the purpose of fostering her and her students’ academic, professional and personal growth.
Six exceptional UD students served at five Dayton nonprofit agencies as members of the Semester of Service program this spring. Students took a “semester off” from classes to serve for as many as 40 hours per week during the spring term. The following describes our site partnerships for the spring term:

**ADVENTURE CENTRAL**, where Kylie Bushroe, a pre-medicine and psychology double major, facilitated educational programming for youth with a focus on science and outdoor education;

**DAKOTA CENTER**, where Erin O’Connell, a dietetics major, coordinated the Homework Club, an after-school program that provides academic support to youth in the MacFarlane neighborhood;

**DAYBREAK YOUTH SHELTER**, where Emma Stiver, a visual arts and human rights double major, engaged in capacity-building efforts to support development efforts and social media outreach;

**EAST END COMMUNITY SERVICES**, where Michelle Tucek, a religious education major, and John Riordan, a biology major, worked with both Ruskin Pre-K-8, a Neighborhood School Center, and at East End Community Services to provide academic support both in the classroom and in the Miracle Makers after-school program; and

**LIFE ESSENTIALS**, where Ellie Hart, a psychology major, engaged in capacity building with the guardianship program and co-facilitated the CHUMS program, a life skills group for adults with mental illness.

Our nonprofit partners value the contributions of Semester of Service students and often view them as integral members of their professional teams. Serving in a full-time capacity allows students to build relationships with staff and members of the community while providing support to key community assets. Our site supervisors also appreciate the opportunity to mentor college students who are invested in the city of Dayton.

To supplement the direct service component, Semester of Service students participated in a minicourse designed to support adaptive capacity as it relates to community work. Students engaged in meaningful reflection to explore their personal growth related to their direct service experience, community building, vocational exploration and social justice. Students met with practitioners in the community and UD faculty to better understand community assets and how these assets are being leveraged to advance positive change.

This past semester’s cohort describes the experience as “transformative.” One key theme from the semester was exploring strategies for working across difference toward a shared vision. One student stated, “Through this experience I feel as if I better understand diversity and how our differences can contribute to our relationships and our teams.”

Semester of Service students and coordinators, left to right: Erin O’Connell, John Riordan, Michelle Tucek, Ellie Hart, Emma Stiver, Kylie Bushroe, Natalie Anderson and Staci Daniels-Sommers.
THE OUTDOOR ENGAGEMENT PORTAL —
A LABOR OF LOVE

BY LIZ MORRISON, RIVER STEWARD ’14

For two years, the 2014 cohort of River Stewards has been hard at work developing a senior project that captures the integrity of Dayton and its rivers. As members of the 2014 cohort, we wanted to show UD students why we’ve grown to love Dayton and its rivers so much. There were many, many ideas that circulated. Our cohort is fiercely ambitious, if nothing else.

The result of two years of brainstorming, planning and implementation became the Outdoor Engagement Portal — an online website hosted by UD Campus Recreation that highlights the restaurants, parks, museums and outdoor recreational opportunities that showcase what Dayton and its rivers have to offer.

The Outdoor Engagement Portal, or OEP, is unique in its sustainability; as the landscape of Dayton changes, so can the OEP. Creating a lasting, sustainable project was important to our cohort, which is why partnering with Campus Recreation and the Outdoor Engagement Center was a perfect match. As the Outdoor Engagement Center has begun its programming for outdoor activities such as kayaking and biking, its mission aligns well with the purpose of the Outdoor Engagement Portal — to guide students to Dayton and its many natural and cultural assets.

The purpose of the Outdoor Engagement Portal: to guide students to Dayton and its many natural and cultural assets.

After creating the website and making it live, the Stewards needed ways to raise awareness for the new resource and encourage students to use it. Thus, a marketing plan was devised, which included monthly Dayton Passports, in which students could win their own outdoor gear; A Taste of Dayton, which highlighted some Dayton restaurant favorites via free food; or Try Kayaking, in which over 70 UD students were able to kayak at Eastwood MetroPark. It was truly incredible to see UD students out on the water, including some who had never kayaked before, having a wonderful time.

Needless to say, the 2014 cohort’s ambition and passion for Dayton and its rivers have translated into a lasting, cohesive project — one that will hopefully benefit our campus and Dayton communities for years to come.
COMMITTED TO MAKING A DIFFERENCE ACROSS CULTURES

BY MARINA LOCASTO, GRADUATE ASSISTANT, DAYTON CIVIC SCHOLAR ‘13

Commitment to community is something the Dayton Civic Scholars have taken to heart. The 2015 cohort is no exception. In the second semester of their junior year, the cohort began to implement their capstone project at Fairview PreK-8. They created an after-school program for refugee students that hail from an array of countries, and Dayton Public Schools selected the 20 lowest-performing refugee students to participate in this program. At the beginning of the semester, DCS visited the children’s families to gain approval for their children to be part of this program. All of the families agreed.

The 2015 cohort made an 18-month commitment to Fairview Neighborhood School Center and is working with DPS to track the participants’ test scores, attendance and discipline over the course of the program. The goal of this program is “to improve academic and social performance with the international refugee population of Dayton in a fun and engaging way,” says junior DCS Jack Raisch. The DCS have incorporated literacy into an array of fun activities that celebrate the diversity of cultures the group offers, congruent with whatever theme the DCS have chosen to pursue for each month. Themes include animals, getting to know one another, and geographic backgrounds of students in the program. Under these umbrella themes, the DCS have used topics such as sports, music, arts and crafts, and games to further engage the students.

The cohort made tremendous strides during the spring in connecting with the students each week, though not without facing challenges. There have been some defiance issues, primarily because the children in the program are just getting to know the DCS. “We want to build trust and credibility that is built on relationships not just necessarily the material,” commented Raisch. He pointed to how the cohort is getting to understand where each child is academically, which is helping immensely. The way the cohort worked together is also helping the students in the program trust and respect the DCS more.

“We are making an intentional effort to be a cohesive unit so we can be consistent and proactive in our next steps,” says Raisch. The DCS want to create a strong foundation to help the program grow itself, so it can be sustainable once the cohort graduates. The 2015 cohort of Dayton Civic Scholars made a commitment to this very special community, and they are dedicated to the success of this very special program.
"How many of you want to live in a place where families, children and adults are in safe, supportive neighborhoods, care for and respect one another, value each other, and succeed in school, the workplace and life?"

Whenever I ask that question to a group of Dayton Civic Scholars, Semester of Service students, River Stewards or to any other community group, invariably everyone raises their hand or nods their head. It is no wonder that such a place would be so attractive. After all, the description is the one used by the Montgomery County Family and Children First Council (FCFC), the lead collaborative for health and human service issues in the county, as its vision statement of what an ideal community looks like.

In 1996, at its very first meeting, the FCFC adopted an approach called Results-Based Accountability™ to guide the efforts of the local community to promote the well-being of its children, families, adults and neighborhoods and to make Montgomery County a better place to live, work and grow — in other words, to help make the local community more like the vision statement. Key components of that approach are a set of tools that the FCFC calls “Outcomes and Indicators.” In March, the FCFC released the 2013 Progress Report on Community Outcomes, Indicators and Strategies, its annual update on the status of those efforts.

**Outcomes** are conditions of well-being to which the community aspires, and **indicators** are quantifiable measures that can be attached to the outcomes. The FCFC has articulated six outcomes (Healthy People; Young People Succeeding; Stable Families; Positive Living for Special Populations; Safe and Supportive Neighborhoods; and Economic Self-Sufficiency) and is currently tracking 27 indicators distributed among the six outcomes. The indicators include items like Access to Healthcare, Kindergarten Readiness, High School Graduation Rate, Substantiated Child Abuse, Employment Rate for Persons with a Disability, Violent Crime and Median Household Income. For some of these indicators, we want the values to increase over time and for others we want them to decrease. By displaying historical data for each indicator, both short-term trends and historical trends can be identified and we can determine how many indicators are moving in the desired direction.

So how are we doing? Are we making progress? According to the 2013 Report, only 13 of the 27 indicators are moving in the desired direction based on their short-term trends. Based on their historical trends, 20 indicators have either moved in the desired direction or have been flat, while the remaining seven indicators have been moving away from the desired direction.

So what are we doing in response to these trends? For one thing, the FCFC and its members are doing more than just looking at all of this information. Overall, a number of different committees and task forces have been formed to respond to these indicators and many other related data. For example, Don Vermillion, director of public projects for the Fitz Center and a member of the FCFC through 2013, says, “The FCFC Progress Report has been used by members of the Young People Succeeding Outcome Team to help evaluate where our focus as a community needs to be to reach our community targets for students’ success. Specifically, the data on kindergarten readiness trends were helpful to the team in prioritizing early learning as a key area for additional resources.”

The 2013 Report includes an update on an important project of the FCFC, the Comprehensive Neighborhood Initiative. The vision of the Comprehensive Neighborhood Initiative is that “by 2025 the neighborhoods of high poverty in Montgomery County would be neighborhoods of outstanding learning. The Comprehensive Neighborhood Initiative provides children and youth in a high-poverty neighborhood with access to great schools and strong systems of family, neighborhood and community support that will prepare them to attain an excellent education, successfully transition to college and career and to become civically engaged.”
Brother Ray Fitz, S.M., Father Ferree Professor of Social Justice in the Fitz Center and also a member of the FCFC through 2013, says, “I believe the Comprehensive Neighborhood Initiative of FCFC is key to helping families and children in high-poverty neighborhoods of Dayton to break the cycle of poverty. In order to realize this vision we need to pay attention to the pipeline from birth to college graduation in Dayton neighborhoods. Key elements in realizing this vision are the Dayton Public Schools’ Neighborhood School Centers in which the staff and students of the Fitz Center are important partners.”

The 2013 Report and all previous reports can be accessed by visiting http://montgomerycountyindicators.org/page/reports.

Readers are encouraged to examine the data and to participate in the ongoing community conversations regarding the quality of life in Montgomery County.
The new student interns at the Fitz Center are diverse; they include River Stewards, Dayton Civic Scholars and a variety of talents. However, they all share gratitude for the opportunities the Fitz Center gives them to learn and develop their appreciation of Dayton. The Rivers Institute welcomes three new interns, Erin Fox, Katelyn Rendulic and Lea Dolimier. They enjoy the connection of their internship and their role as River Stewards. Erin updates the Rivers Institute website and publications. As a graphic design major, she appreciates the chance to use her skills to prepare for her future profession. Katelyn coordinates summer programs. She is looking forward to a larger role in the events this year with community partners. Lea has been working on the RiverMobile to ensure its sustainability as an asset to the Rivers Institute. She is excited to do more educational outreach with the RiverMobile and to watch it grow.

The new interns have a lot to offer and will be sure to take full advantage of upcoming opportunities.

Abbey Saurine is research assistant to Brother Ray Fitz, S.M. She has recently begun a new project researching childhood poverty in Dayton as well as connecting her findings to Dayton’s Neighborhood School Centers.

Sam Mullins has taken the lead on planning community bus tours, assisting as a tour guide with Dick Ferguson as well as planning and scheduling the tours with the community partners. Being from Dayton, Sam has enjoyed this opportunity to learn more about his city.

Olivia Hirt is a Dayton Civic Scholar working as an intern with the DCS program and has enjoyed learning from her co-workers and cohort about Dayton. She has been planning the fall orientation for the 2017 cohort and is looking forward to sharing her passion for the city with the new scholars.

Catherine Arensberg (not shown) joins the Fitz Center team as an intern with Dick Ferguson. Her interests in food and sustainability will be put to work in a seminar project with the Edgemont and Carillon neighborhoods.

Katie Brossart is excited about her new position and looking forward to the opportunities to come. She works closely with Suzette Pico, assisting with administrative tasks in the Fitz Center.

The Community Engaged Learning team has added two new interns: Maggie Schaller and Saehan Lenzen. Saehan is creating a database of volunteer work done by students, and she is excited to see where this new position will take her. Maggie works mostly with special projects but is excited to become more involved with the Semester of Service program next semester.

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Polly Long, School Psychology Graduate Program, Neighborhood School Centers Graduate Assistant for Community Engaged Learning: Five years ago, I would have never thought that I would be working toward my education specialist degree, after having completed my master’s and bachelor’s degrees at the University of Dayton. I chose to stay here because I value the way UD faculty, staff and students foster my academic, professional and personal growth. No group of persons has fostered my growth quite like those in the Fitz Center, where my co-workers have educated me on community engagement, provided me with valuable experiences, and demonstrated the importance of social capital. For this, and much more, I am glad to be a part of the Fitz Center team.

Bethany Renner, Master of Public Administration, Rivers Institute Graduate Assistant: My involvement in the Rivers Institute has transformed my perspective on personal development and the definition and fulfillment of “community.” Each opportunity (River Steward, intern and graduate assistant) was an incremental step in growth and respect for shared work and thinking. Whether the day brought loading a kayak trailer or planning and facilitating the RiverMobile, the lasting influence of teamwork resides. I am full of pride and feel fortunate to have experienced an environment where a question or project was always worth exploring. I never felt obligated to hide my enthusiastic passion, and the mission of community building was fully embodied and respected.

Alex Galluzzo, Master of Business Administration, Rivers Institute Graduate Assistant: During the past five years, I have had the wonderful opportunity of being a River Steward and graduate assistant in the Fitz Center. I was lucky enough to be a part of the RiverMobile project morphing from lofty dream to an actual 53-foot semi-trailer rolling down our local highways. While helping lead that project was an extremely large accomplishment for me and the Rivers Institute, my favorite transformations have been those of the River Stewards. It has been an honor working with these students and watching them grow from nervous sophomores to amazing community leaders willing to jump into any situation.

Natalie Anderson, School Psychology Graduate Program, Semester of Service Graduate Assistant for Community Engaged Learning: I completed my undergraduate work in psychology at UD and continued here to pursue an educational specialist degree. I had the opportunity to work as the graduate assistant for the Semester of Service program, for which I mentored and supported four cohorts of students in a little more than a year. As I begin my yearlong school psychology internship in Beavercreek City Schools, I will close an important chapter of my life here at UD and the Fitz Center. I deeply value the community building and close relationships aspect that I have learned here, and I know I will incorporate it into my future practices. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at the Fitz Center and look forward to keeping in touch with everyone.
Students from throughout the world have discovered the University of Dayton. During the past academic year, 1,930 students from 65 other countries enrolled as undergraduate and graduate students. The face and feel of the campus community have changed quickly and will continue to reflect UD’s global reach in the 21st century.

So what do our international students really learn about the United States? About democracy and democratic citizenship? About local community governance? About the nonprofit organizations that make a local community more than a political jurisdiction? I first asked myself these questions a few years ago as I entertained a group of Chinese students at a Dayton Dragons baseball game. Did the students have enough awareness to appreciate our community of Dayton and local communities in general as more than marketplaces? Did they experience the unique characteristics of U.S. democracy in some way that might influence how they understood our country when they returned to become leaders in their own countries? Did they see baseball for its cultural significance?

This summer, with the help of the Center for International Programs and my Fitz Center colleagues, I acted on my questions. MEET Dayton enrolled 17 undergraduate and graduate international students in a six-week minicourse that was taught on the Fitz Center bus. The students were from China, Japan, Bahrain and France. As with our other bus tours, we visited some of Dayton’s remarkable organizational and natural assets. Carillon Historical Park, Dayton Aviation Heritage Museum, the Peace Museum, City Hall, Dayton Art Institute, Daybreak, East End Community Services, Five Oaks Neighborhood, Miami Conservancy District, Five Rivers MetroParks, the Great Miami River and Fifth Third Field were our destinations.

Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley welcomed us in commission chambers and updated the students on Welcome Dayton, the city’s immigrant and refugee initiative. We experienced the commitment of a volunteer neighborhood leader, the intuitive hospitality of our community, the passion of our citizens, the creativity that defines us globally, and the innocence of children growing up in poverty. At each stop, the students were eager to find out how they might continue to be involved as volunteers. At Fifth Third Field, the Dragons staff explained how professional sport in the United States is a private enterprise, a business as opposed to a nationalized program. At East End, 60 children bonded quickly with students whose backgrounds and languages were different from anything they had experienced in their diverse neighborhood. At the Dayton Art Institute, students learned that the arts in the United States are largely nonprofit or “third sector” organizations that require both public and private support. The same lesson was relearned when, at Daybreak, they heard that most nonprofit human services combine donations and government grants to provide essential human services.

I am confident that these 17 UD international students will return to their home countries more appreciative of the subtleties of democracy in the United States. There is no better place in this country to teach these lessons than Dayton, Ohio. Relationships produce and sustain results. We must continue to build community. This is what the Fitz Center was created to do.
NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL CENTERS FOCUS ON THIRD-GRADE READING

BY DON VERMILLION, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROJECTS

Dayton’s Neighborhood School Centers have been preparing during the past year for the State of Ohio Third-Grade Reading Guarantee, a policy designed to identify students who are behind in reading and support them to get back on track for reading success. Community resources including University of Dayton students, local church groups, service clubs, local businesses and parent volunteers have been working through lunchtime “reading buddies” programs and after-school programs to support the reading progress that is taking place in the classroom.

Specifically related to University of Dayton students, 751 UD students shared their time and talent as service learners and volunteers during the past year, with 181 of those participating in weekly interaction with the Dayton Public Schools students.

The preliminary data from the Ohio Department of Education show a reading test passage rate overall in the Dayton Public Schools third-grade classes of 65.2%. Three of the Dayton’s Neighborhood School Centers — Cleveland PreK-6, Ruskin PreK-8 and Kiser PreK-8 — were among the top seven Dayton Public Schools in the third-grade reading test results: Cleveland School had a passage rate of 76%; Ruskin School had 77% of its students passing; and Kiser School’s result was a 64% passage rate. Ruskin School has shown an increased percentage of students passing the third-grade reading test in each of the past three school years, while Cleveland and Kiser Schools have shown an increased percentage passing the third-grade reading test in each of the past four years. In addition, Fairview PreK-8 School doubled the number of students passing the third-grade reading test from the 2012-13 school year to the 2013-14 school year.

Based on the preliminary results reported, the Fitz Center wants to recognize and thank the Neighborhood School Centers’ site coordinators for their creativity and hard work in assisting the school district in making progress on this important State of Ohio goal of third-grade reading improvement. The support of the Neighborhood School Centers’ partners is also significant — the YMCA of Greater Dayton, the Salvation Army Kroc Center, East End Community Services and Good Samaritan Hospital.

Those students not passing the third-grade reading test are now in summer school to prepare for an additional testing opportunity later this summer.

Below: UD student Meredith Ivan reads with a Fairview student in preparation for the third-grade reading test.

Bottom: A Paws to Read trained therapy dog sits with a trainer and students while the students practice reading.
More than 3,500 individuals have visited the RiverMobile since its debut in spring 2013. Groups of YMCA campers, cohorts of OSHER Lifelong Learning older adults, Dayton Public Schools students and many other audiences have embarked on the five-classroom journey of local, national and global watershed education. As anticipated, the RiverMobile is proving an effective tool to educate multiple audiences and advocate for mindful, sustainable watershed appreciation. Learning to teach the RiverMobile is also a skill in itself. River Stewards, graduate assistants and Rivers Institute staff members quickly learned the necessity of adaptive leadership and tactful communication while facilitating tours of the RiverMobile. As a result, each RiverMobile tour is a mutually beneficial educational experience.

So, what does a River Steward learn from leading RiverMobile tours?

First, adaptive capacity is essential. For River Stewards, teaching about water is exciting. It’s invigorating to teach because many River Stewards are passionately concerned with the preservation of our unique Great Miami Buried Valley Aquifer. However, our sheer enthusiasm and passion for the topic are not enough to truly educate others. Adapting tours for multiple audiences is a lesson in tactical communication, personalized group interaction and strategic language choices. Whether it’s explaining the watershed as a bathtub of sand and gravel or ensuring that each person gets a turn sitting in the canoe, River Steward tour guides attest to the necessity for interactive, adaptive leadership techniques depending on each tour’s group dynamics.

Second, start local. The RiverMobile is a mobile learning studio with local learning opportunities. Leading tours gives Stewards a unique opportunity to localize each site and situate it within the watershed for participants. River Stewards learn to analyze, value and validate each new RiverMobile site to better inform participants of their individual roles in watershed protection. For example, each tour begins at the colorful and playful watershed map. During each tour, River Stewards encourage participants, regardless of age, to touch their home locations on the map. Localizing makes the abstract real for participants and helps River Stewards give each participant a personalized stake in watershed management. Although River Steward minicourses teach this concept from the very beginning, making local real for others takes practice.

Finally, ask questions and listen to the answers. River Stewards like to talk; we are an educated and enthusiastic bunch. Unfortunately, this sometimes leads to a one-sided presentation. However, leading tours of the RiverMobile has helped many of us further develop patience and balance when leading large groups. We have learned to validate our participants by requesting their participation and broken the barrier between lecture and dialogue. In addition, learning to listen patiently to group responses has helped River Stewards see the watershed from the perspectives of multiple ages, races, socioeconomic groups and personalities.

Adaptive capacity, localizing, and balancing inquiry and advocacy during tours are three learning outcomes for River Steward tour guides. While each brings his or her own personal style and delivery to a RiverMobile tour, we all have learned how to incorporate Fitz Center principles into our tour guide leadership. The RiverMobile is both an asset for community-wide watershed education and an essential personal leadership development tool for River Stewards.

Great day on the river
The River Steward summer interns and Rivers Institute coordinator Leslie King complete a paddle on the Mad and Great Miami rivers. In addition to guiding groups through the RiverMobile, the team led dozens of community groups on river excursions during the summer. Pictured, from left, are Katelyn Rendulic, coordinator Leslie King, Andrew Kowalski, Casey LeBrun, Anna Adami and Steve Berlage.
FITZ CENTER CONVENES LEADERS AROUND NEIGHBORHOODS AND RIVERS

29th Annual CityLinks Neighborhood Leadership Conference • April 11, 2014

Above: Dayton Development Coalition President and CEO Jeff Hougland delivers the keynote address at the CityLinks Conference.

Above: Patricia Rickman and Kevin Jones acknowledge their 2014 Community Builders Awards.

7th Annual River Summit • March 14, 2014

Above: Community and organizational leaders talk about how they and their organizations are willing to spend their time, talent and expertise to support the efforts of the Ohio’s Great Corridor Association visioning breakouts.

Below: River Stewards help staff the 7th annual River Summit which had over 250 people in attendance this year.

Left: Ohio’s Great Corridor Board Members presented Montgomery County Commissioner, Dan Foley, with the 2013 Ohio’s Great Corridor Champion of the Year Award.
On May 2, the Fitz Center honored 62 graduating students and presented them with certificates proclaiming them community builders. We also presented the Monalisa Mullins Commitment to Community Award to four outstanding sophomore students and the Emily M. Klein Student Community Leadership Award to two remarkable graduate students.

The Emily Klein Award is presented annually to the student(s) “who best exemplify the passion for Dayton, commitment to strengthening UD student connections to the city, openness to learning and making a lasting impact on the urban community, and leadership excellence demonstrated by Emily Klein McFadden in her five-year student career with the Fitz Center.” Eleven undergraduate and graduate students were nominated by the Fitz Center staff. Bethany Renner and Alex Galluzzo were awarded this year’s “Emily.”

Like Emily, Bethany and Alex were part of the Fitz Center for five years. They were leaders of the 2012 River Stewards cohort that brought RecBikes to campus and began planning for the RiverMobile and the River Leadership Curriculum. As graduate assistants, they brought these projects to fruition and mentored the next two cohorts of River Stewards. Bethany is now at DECA Prep and Alex at Heidelberg Distributing. Both continue to love and serve our community and our rivers.

In the Fitz Center and the Rivers Institute, we have no “junior staff.” Our leadership team is supported by colleagues including graduate assistants and undergraduate interns. These team members bring us new ideas, enthusiasm, special skills and hope in our future. Our graduating students and award winners are already “leaders who build and sustain community.”