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Raising Walls, Building Community

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Raising Walls, Building Community

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Monday August 28, 2023

By Eric F. Spina

As we left St. Mary's Hall last Sunday afternoon and headed toward "B" lot, Provost Darlene Weaver and I were greeted by a joyful rat-a-tat-tat from a couple hundred hammers wielded by business students driving nails into 2x4's and 2x6's. During move-in weekend, they turned a campus parking lot into a makeshift construction site for the building of walls for two Habitat for Humanity houses. It was a sight to behold.

We picked up hammers, too, and started pounding away simply to show that we were capable, as the first-year business students were quite up to the task themselves. Within four hours, 500 students, faculty, staff, and volunteers had accomplished the equivalent of four weeks of work. Wow! Talk about productivity, teamwork, discipline, and selflessness — all traits that will bode well for these future business leaders.

The service project prominently and effectively communicated to our newest students what UD is all about. We are deeply committed to the common good, and we believe we can accomplish the extraordinary when we work together. From the moment these business

students stepped foot on campus, they started learning what servant-leadership means, and they quickly realized we prize community engagement and hands-on experience.

Beyond that, the project served as a powerful ice breaker as students worked side by side with their peers, upper-class students, and faculty in an environment outside the classroom.

“I think anytime someone is doing something new it can be intimidating, but I saw students step outside of their comfort zones, develop confidence, and cheer each other on as they completed walls. I could see friendships being formed, connections being made, and, most importantly, service in action to support our community,” said Allie Ellison, associate director of recruiting initiatives and special projects in the School of Business Administration, who helped to organize the event.

The project was modeled after a similar one at Indiana University Bloomington, where business students and the local Habitat for Humanity chapter have built homes together for more than a decade.

“The University of Dayton has one of the largest and most dynamic Habitat for Humanity campus chapters in the U.S. Every semester we receive hundreds of hours of volunteerism from UD students,” said David Mauch, development director for Habitat for Humanity for Greater Dayton. I wanted to figure out a way to do something more pronounced and bigger with the University of Dayton, and our build this weekend accomplished that goal.”

Such a large project big requires a strong foundation of support. Habitat for Humanity and Building Hope provided the materials for the project, with additional sponsorship from Fischer Homes, FHLB Cincinnati, Five Rivers Health Center, and Fifth Third Bank. I tip my hat to Trevor Collier, dean of the School of Business Administration, and his SBA team for engaging new and returning students in the build.

One of the homes will be located in the nearby Edgemont neighborhood where business students will continue to work on the construction with the help of volunteers and partner families. They’ve already started creating a porch sheet to hang outside the house to officially welcome the family when it is move-in ready.

These UD students aren’t just building houses. They’re building community.

(Photo by Shravanth Reddy Reddy '24)