

Beyond Greenwood: Destination New Orleans

Greenwood's New Alternative Spring Break Program Expands the Horizons of Community Service Learning

by Adam Jones

"It is going to take us all day to gut this one house, and look at all the houses on this one street alone... New Orleans has a long way to go."

The Community Service Learning's (CSL) inaugural Alternative Spring Break (ASB) Trip to New Orleans from March 8th-16th was a huge success! The six boys that went on the Trip – Stephen Anderson (07), Felix Anzola, Toma Blatchford, Dallin Butterworth (07), Nicolas Monterosso and Scott Serfling – had an amazing time experiencing New Orleans, both in culture and having the chance to get their hands dirty in community reconstruction. Greenwood's burgeoning CSL Program wants to extend a heart-felt thank you to the parents of these boys for supporting us in making Greenwood history! Our group certainly set a precedent for the future of Spring Break at Greenwood.

We arrived in New Orleans in the evening on March 8th, 2007 and made our way to the French Quarter with twenty-five pieces of luggage in tow, eight 35 lbs boxes of books to be donated to local schools, and a group excitement that bordered on overwhelming. We had traveled from Greenwood early in the morning to Hartford then onto Atlanta, and now we were finally there – New Orleans. Leading up to our departure, we spent four weeks learning about New Orleans culture, Hurricane Katrina and had many discussions about the service work that we would be doing along with all the fun



SEEING IT FIRSTHAND: Six boys participated in Greenwood's first alternative spring break program, learning about the reconstruction and preservation of New Orleans.

activities we had planned for the week. The final night before we left, our entire group had dinner at our house to talk about expectations for the trip, go over last minute details and answer any final questions.

In terms of service work, our group volunteered for four days of the seven that we were in New Orleans. We worked with a local, volunteer-staffed organization, called Common Ground. On Saturday the 10th, we worked with a local man to finish gutting his one-story house. Wearing tyvek suits, goggles, heavy rubber boots, gas masks and wielding crowbars, hammers and wheelbarrows we gleefully knocked down molded drywall, ceiling tiles and transported it all out to a heaping pile on the curb. It was hot exhausting work, but in the course of seven hours we completed the job. On Sunday the 11th, we did the same type of work, but this same time it was in a two-story apartment complex and we worked alongside thirty volunteers from various universities. By the end of the day, our group had finished gutting the first floor and was ready for showers and nice warm dinner. During our lunch breaks on both days, one of the boys commented to the group while looking up and down the block, "It is going to take us all day to gut this one



Greenwood students hand-delivered over 280 pounds of books to local schools in New Orleans as part of the Hello Friend / Ellis William Cosby Foundation Library Project.



Student Scott Serfling meets the local wildlife during a swamp-boat tour.

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Common Ground's Wetlands Restoration Project

house, and look at all the houses on this one street alone that have yet to be opened and gutted – this is endless work. New Orleans has a long way to go.” We also discovered during our time with Common Ground that many of the houses that don’t get gutted get knocked down by the local government and people lose their land as a result of not having the money to pay to gut their own houses. People, especially the poor, are unjustly losing their land all over New Orleans. Volunteering to gut houses, for free, is a very important component in the reconstruction and preservation of New Orleans. We were very proud to be gutting. Plus it was fun to throw a hammer or a crowbar through a wall and rip it down!

On Tuesday the 13th, we volunteered with Common Ground’s Wetlands Restoration Project and drove our van south to the bayou. We went with another group of volunteers to pull swamp grass from a local nursery, place it in plastic bags and transport it back to New Orleans to help shore up the eroding coastline. It was a very muddy afternoon that consisted of mud wrestling, swamp grass pulling and projectile mud balls! It was well worth the effort, though, because we managed to pull \$14,000 (donated by the nursery owners) worth of swamp grass to be replanted in New Orleans! On our last day in New Orleans we brought

nine boxes of books (300 books in each box) to a local school to assist them with their after-school reading and mentoring program. The Director of the program graciously gave us a tour of the school, but the highlight of the visit was that we got to hang out with the kids! A local Putney non-profit, the Hello Friend/Ennis William Cosby Foundation Library Project, donated the books we transported from Greenwood.

It wasn’t all work for the seven days we were in New Orleans. We also spent a lot of time experiencing New Orleans’ culture and people. Our group went on a guided Hurricane Katrina tour of the city, went to the local zoo, saw an IMAX about the New Orleans’ bayou and the disastrous effects of Katrina, listened to live music at Preservation Hall, went on an Airboat Swamp tour with alligators, walked around the French Quarter, watched street performers, went to the Ripley’s Believe it or Not Museum, enjoyed a graveyard tour with Bloody Mary, and had many dinners out to get the full taste of New Orleans’ style food. Every evening before bedtime, our group would sit down together, talk about the day, and have quiet reflection time to work in journals or make video-journal entries. Having a daily reflection period, both individually and as a group, was a very important staple of our time in New Orleans because it helped all of us to make meaning of what we saw during the day, and in the end internalize why we were in there.

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Beyond Greenwood (continued)

When we returned to Greenwood, our group made a presentation to the entire community about our trip. It was amazing to watch the boys 'own' their experience in New Orleans and develop a sense of pride for the work they did while down there for the week. They all came back experts on New Orleans culture and advocates for the work still left to accomplish in order to restore the city to pre-Katrina levels. In fact, many of the boys on the trip used their experience in New Orleans as the subject of their spring term writing project!

During the first week of this year's Spring break, March 6th – 13th 2008, the CSL Program will be leading another trip of Greenwood boys back to New Orleans. We will be taking six boys and two faculty members on a week-long trip focusing on the same themes from the first trip. More details to follow by email. If you are interested, please don't hesitate to contact us!

Greenwood Moments



Mick Sheehan finds a lucky four-leaf clover while volunteering with the Youth Horticulture Project in Brattleboro, VT

CSL SUMMER 2007 GREETINGS FROM MEXICO!





Greenwood's Connect Program Provides Summer Travel & Learning Opportunities for Non-Greenwood Students

One exciting development at Greenwood over the last few years is the growth in our Community Service Learning (CSL) Program. The goal of the CSL Program is to provide our students with the kind of learning experiences that all of our nation's students need to become confident and capable individuals and world citizens. Beginning in the spring of 2006, the CSL Program developed beyond the local service activities that are an important staple of life at Greenwood to provide learning and service experiences for our middle school age students to national and international sites during their school and summer vacations. For example, last year, Greenwood students participated in highly successful community service learning trips to New Orleans and Mexico.

We wanted those experiences to be authentic, eye-opening learning experiences that developed understanding, confidence, and insight; that used the unique capabilities of our students; and that supported their continued personal, social, and academic growth. Thus, we designed the program with three phases: 1) pre-education and preparation; 2) the two-week service experience; and 3) reflection and wrap-up. The first and third phases are 2-3 day campus-based experiences, and involve parents on the opening and closing days. In preparing for the trips, students learn the information and skills needed for the trip (for example, the students sorted and packed the books that they brought to New Orleans schools, or built the bee hives they delivered to a Mexican community). Back on campus for the final phase, they summarize their journals, organize their pictures and videos, and develop the presentations they will share with their families. The key part of the program is the two-week experience itself, and in that regard, Greenwood is especially fortunate to have Adam and Kate Jones designing and leading the trips. Kate is a Greenwood teacher, advisor to the Student Council and residential staff member; and her husband, Adam; a returned Peace Corps youth volunteer (Vanuatu 2002-2004) also lives on the Greenwood campus while finishing his Master's degree. He works for Greenwood residential, and with local community service organizations.

We knew that the trips would be a great success for the students, and they were in so many ways. However, what we didn't anticipate was the depth of the reaction from both students and parents. Their enthusiasm was overwhelming and left us contemplating the possibility of opening up our summer CSL Program to all middle school boys and girls who would blossom with individual attention and care, benefit from non-traditional learning environments and who are looking for positive experiences.

Recognizing an amazing opportunity to create a program that could change lives and truly set the standard for service-learning with middle school girls and boys, we created the Connect Summer Program. Its mission is to provide dynamic, challenging and fun summer community service-learning programs individualized for middle school-age boys and girls that foster self-reflection, mutual responsibility, and a commitment to community. We are seeking to expand the already highly effective and nurturing Greenwood experience to include more middle school boys and girls at a crucial time in their life when participating in service-learning can redefine identity.

The Connect Summer Program will be a three-week summer camp in either July or August 2008 based from Greenwood's campus. The first phase will be a three day orientation and pre-education at Greenwood; the second phase will be the two-week service-learning trip in the various locations; and the third phase will be a three day reflection and presentation at Greenwood. We will be running five co-ed trips this summer each with 10 students and 3 faculty members. Trip locations currently under development are: Kenai Peninsula, Alaska; Oahu, Hawaii; Redwood National Forest, California; Yellowstone National Park and Teton National Park, Wyoming; and Costa Rica. The Greenwood School is marketing the Connect Program across the country and will likely fill the 50 spots on its five trips during the winter of 2008. For the most up to date information, or to request a catalog detailing Connect's trips, check out Connect's website: connect.greenwood.org

Spaces are limited, and they will fill up soon! So, if you are interested, please don't hesitate to contact Adam Jones at ajones@greenwood.org or (802) 999-0066 to secure your son's spot!