

The Good Neighbor

by Chris Gregor



Community Thanksgiving Dinner



Students and faculty, including professor of applied exercise science Margaret Jones (bottom picture, at right) and her students, work on neighborhood beautification projects during a recent Humanics in Action Day.

“My two partners became like family. Their help was awesome and I looked forward to the Partners Program every day. I couldn’t wait to get back on campus and tell them all I did. It was one of the most influential things in my life, and I will always remember my partners and all the fun we had together.”

—Anthony Medina, DeBerry School student

TO NEIGHBORHOOD YOUNGSTERS like Anthony Medina from DeBerry School, Springfield College is more than just the big college around the corner. Because of the Partners Program, or any of the other scores of community programs and initiatives, Springfield College has a human face and caring touch. It makes a major impact on lives because of its tradition of going beyond its campus borders to fulfill its Humanics philosophy. Since 2000, the College’s community engagement initiatives have been in overdrive as a key part of strategic planning.

According to Brendan Neal, director of community relations, community engagement is playing out in a number of ways. “Along with some major strategic partners including the YMCA, the National Football Foundation Center for Youth Development through Sport, PROHill Partnership, and the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, we are staying connected to, and collaborating with, the community. The mission of leadership and service to others is really moving ahead now and is well understood and unique to Springfield College—we’ve made our mark and continue to make our mark. This is an important priority.”

“Service to other people has been our core value for more than 100 years,” explains President Richard B. Flynn. “Utilizing the talents of our students, faculty, and staff to address community needs; leveraging our resources; and partnering with other stakeholders in our community; we’re working to make our region a better place in which to live, work, and learn. We strive to be a part of—not apart from—the community.”

Neighbor-to-Neighbor

Programs to improve physical infrastructure have made a recognizable impact on neighborhoods near the College. As part of the **Neighborhood Housing Collaborative**, Springfield College provided financial security for a \$1.5 million property acquisition loan fund. This fund allows the collaborative to borrow money at below market rates to acquire property for building or rehabilitating 100 homes. The affordable homes will be for owner-occupants in the neighborhood surrounding the College and will be completed during the next five years. (See Off Alden Street, page 3.)

Partnership for the Renewal of Old Hill (PROHill), founded in 2003, is a partnership among Springfield College, the City of Springfield, and the Old Hill Neighborhood Council. It is dedicated to transforming one of Springfield’s most deteriorated neighborhoods into a model of infrastructure, safety, owner-occupied housing, educational resources, and recreational space. For Springfield College’s leadership in PROHill, **HAP, Inc.**, the region’s housing partnership, honored the College with its 2005 Award for Leadership and Achievement at its Celebration of Neighborhood Transformation and Renewal in October 2005. Omega Johnson, president of the Old Hill Neighborhood Association, presented President Flynn with the award, which recognized the College’s leadership in community development.

In September 2006, Springfield College was named one of the 25 “best neighbor” urban colleges in the United States by Evan



AmeriCorps participants celebrate their recent grant award

Dobelle, president of the New England Board of Higher Education. The **“Saviors of Our Cities”** list cited colleges for having dramatically strengthened the economy and quality of life in their neighboring community by their careful strategic planning and thoughtful use of resources.

One-to-One

In the **Partners Program**, student volunteers like Ben Braumbaugh '08 complement their academic work with real-life experiences. Braumbaugh is on the front lines of community engagement on a weekly basis: “One of the best aspects of the Partners Program is the one-on-one time with my youth partner, Jose Puello. We learned that the only thing separating us is age and the roofs we sleep under. Partners is a great way for the youth of Springfield to experience the life of a college student. We hope that the program will get kids on the right track and see that going to college can be a reality.”

Charlene Elvers, director of student volunteer programs, oversees this program that annually pairs 65 Springfield College students with third- to eighth-grade children from the local DeBerry and Brookings elementary schools. Each week, tutoring, mentoring, and other activities take place, as well as dinner in Cheney Dining Hall. Altogether, more than 1,200 local youngsters have been served. “The program is in its fourteenth year, says Elvers. It began when then-president Randolph Bromery went to neighborhood schools and asked how many kids had ever visited Springfield College. Very few had, so he had the idea to start a program to engage our students with the community by opening up campus to children so they would have some

exposure to Springfield College.” Partners is just one way students, faculty, and administrators are helping change lives in numerous programs and venues in the community.

The Springfield College **AmeriCorps Program**, established in 1997, combines undergraduate and graduate student education with important work in the community. Students serve as academic coaches for under-performing children, and as counselors and health case managers for children and families. Students increase the capacity of service organizations by recruiting, training, and managing more than 5,000 volunteers. They also conduct leadership development activities for more than 200 children. In 2006, the Corporation for National and Community Service awarded the College a grant to expand the program to 125 students per year for three years. Additionally, the College and partnering organizations contribute additional funds.

Erin Nau, a graduate student in the School of Social Work and an AmeriCorps member for two years, now serves at the Springfield Day Nursery. One of her half-dozen clients is a young mother who recently left a domestic violence shelter. In addition to helping the mother obtain citizenship and necessary benefits, Nau works with the woman’s eldest son, a fifth grader. “We have long talks and have bonded over the positive changes in her son. When she gave me a big hug to thank me, it was the greatest reward for my work,” Nau says. Jill Russell, Ph.D., vice president for strategic planning and executive assistant to the president, says the program is unique in combining academic requirements with AmeriCorps service. “Education majors work in schools and physician assistant students work in short-staffed emergency rooms at

The list of collaborations, community relationships, and recognitions of Springfield College as a good neighbor is extensive. The following are highlights.

Humanics in Action Day

Each September, Springfield College cancels classes and operates offices on reduced staffing for Humanics in Action Day, a full-day event that has 2,000 students, faculty, and staff performing projects in the community.

Scholarships to Springfield Residents

Springfield College invests \$1,120,000 annually in scholarship funds for Springfield residents.

Employee Assistance Housing Program

Through its Employee Assistance Program, Springfield College is contributing to the revitalization of the Old and Upper Hill neighborhoods of Springfield by helping full time College employees purchase housing in these areas.

Fee Waivers on Facility Rentals

Springfield College donates the use of its facilities free of charge to community organizations that are partnering with the College, such as the American Cancer Society, American Lung Association, Senior Games, and Special Olympics.

Student Teachers, Internships, Practica

Approximately 700 student teachers of education, health sciences, rehabilitation, recreation, social work, human services, humanities, physical sciences, and other subjects augment the teaching staffs of area schools annually.

Service Learning Initiative

Service-learning and fieldwork projects are a vital part of the Springfield College experience and impact Springfield-area families.

Basketball Hall of Fame Relationship

A connection that dates back to the invention of the game of basketball in 1881 by James Naismith, an alumnus and Springfield College faculty member, today the relationship between the College and the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame is manifested in events like the HoopHall Classic, hosted by the College, where local, regional, and national teams compete, bringing more than 10,000 visitors to the City of Springfield.

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Baystate and Providence medical centers,” says Russell. “In a community where there are so many underserved individuals, our members work wonders.”

Since 2005, **Springfield Leaders of Tomorrow** has awarded hundreds of Springfield adolescents, aged twelve to eighteen, with community leadership scholarships. In a two-week summer leadership training experience on campus, they participate in classroom and outdoor adventure exercises to enhance their confidence, communication and teamwork skills, and leadership experience. In the subsequent academic year, they lead activities in community organizations to further develop their character and academic success, with on-site support from Springfield College students. Ted France '91, G'93, associate professor of physical education and contact for the program, says, “A teacher from Putnam High School told me she can tell which students have gone through the program because of their skills in working, organizing, and engaging others in class. Parents are amazed at the level of thinking their children are capable of after the program. We equip kids to exceed their own expectations and those of the adults around them—that’s what makes an engaged community leader.”

The College makes its presence felt at the **YMCA of Greater Springfield**, where College administrators and faculty members serve on the corporate board and administrative committees. Students, preparing for careers as YMCA leaders, assist administrators; coach and referee sports; and organize events, tournaments, and youth programs.

In the College’s partnership with **Reeds Landing**, Springfield College faculty and students of art therapy, social work, human services, and education conduct programs for residents at the retirement community located adjacent to the College’s East Campus. College administrators serve on the Reeds Landing board and administrative committees while Reeds Landing residents are enriched through Springfield College performing and visual arts programs, lectures, short courses, and field trips with the Learning in Later Life program.

While the scope of community engagement at Springfield College is vast and encompasses many individuals and initiatives, they all have one thing in common—a commitment to the people in whose neighborhood SC has become a good neighbor. Its essence is beautifully summed up by DeBerry Elementary School student Kayla Rodriguez in her tribute to SC Partners Program volunteers: “They will forever be in my heart.” ▽



Verizon Reads



Art For Everyone



Habitat for Humanity SC Chapter

William Simpson Fine Arts Series

Springfield College has a wealth of artistic offerings for the College family—as well as to its neighborhood families—from art exhibits, to dance concerts, to Broadway performances, as part of the William Simpson Fine Arts Series.

Office of Student Volunteer Programs

Springfield College’s Office of Student Volunteer Programs places student volunteers in many single-event and ongoing service projects throughout the year, coordinating approximately 4,330 hours of community service annually.

MCDI Community Thanksgiving Dinner

Aramark, the College’s food service, MCDI staff, and volunteers from the College and community work together annually to serve a community holiday dinner to hundreds, free of charge.

America Reads Program

Through the America Reads Program, which promotes literacy awareness through the collaborative efforts of students, classroom teachers, librarians, and reading specialists, thousands of students’ lives in more than 20 area agencies and schools are enriched by reading.

Girls and Women in Sports Day

As a part of the annual National Girls and Women in Sports Day, Springfield College faculty and student athletes conduct clinics for more than 160 girls in grades three through eight in sports including softball, soccer, volleyball, field hockey, lacrosse, gymnastics, tennis, yoga, football, and rock climbing.

Athletic Teams Volunteer Efforts

Springfield College athletic team members volunteer in tutoring, conducting sports clinics, and in providing services for needy families and individuals. They also help with neighborhood cleanup, fundraising for not-for-profit organizations, and other community service projects.

Habitat for Humanity

Springfield College faculty, staff, and students have taken the lead in building homes in Springfield as a part of Habitat for Humanity, and have worked on other Habitat projects in Greater Springfield.