

Lending a Hand

See what leaders gain when they give

By Ashley Mann

While few people will work for free, students delight in volunteering with a myriad of organizations. Volunteering not only helps students meet college entrance requirements but also makes them more effective leaders. Here are three Florida leaders who share how volunteering helps them succeed both in school and in life.

Not your average ManaTEEN

While a majority of students volunteer through school clubs and activities, Mike Monaghan gives of himself through a community outreach program. "I like volunteering through ManaTEEN instead of a school club because the activities performed are true community volunteer activities," Monaghan says. During the last five years, Monaghan, a senior at Lakewood Ranch High in Bradenton, has volunteered more than 5,000 hours through ManaTEEN, a club that promotes youth volunteerism and assists students in fulfilling classroom and college scholarship requirements. Monaghan is currently president of this 10,000-member strong club. "Being president of the nation's largest volunteer organization requires me to be able to go do anything at anytime," Monaghan says.

Monaghan also volunteers regularly with organizations such as the American Red Cross, United Way, the blood bank, the school board, and the Manatee County government.

He says volunteering makes him a better leader because he shares what he has seen and felt with others. "Volunteering has made me open-minded to problems other people face," Monaghan says.

SAVEing the Day

Some students volunteer through both school activities and on personal time like Ashley Sheppard, a senior at Crescent City Jr./Sr. High. Sheppard serves as co-president of the school's Senior Council and is involved in organizations such as Families, Community, and Career Leaders of America (FCCLA), Future Farmers of America (FFA), and Students Actively Volunteering for the Environment (S.A.V.E.).

"Through S.A.V.E., I volunteer time to help clean up roads, lakes, rivers, and parks in Putnam County," Sheppard says. "By donating my time, I am helping the

community and showing pride in my town."

Sheppard also volunteers at a local nursing home with some of her friends. There she offers manicures to residents and provides companionship. "Volunteering is a great morale booster, to see what my little bit of help has done to the lives of others," she says.

One of her memorable experiences volunteering occurred when she offered to be a junior staff member for the Mid-Florida Hugh O. Bryan Youth Leadership Seminar. Sheppard says she did a lot of behind-the-scenes work to keep the seminar running smoothly. "During the weekend, I helped get sophomores from meeting to meeting and prepared food," she says. Sheppard also made entrance and exit packs for the participants.

Volunteering at the Special Olympics was also a special time for Sheppard. "We cheered on the athletes and were around to lend a hand if needed," she says.

Volunteering helps make her a better person and leader, she says. It makes her feel good knowing that she has done activities that do not just revolve around her. "When I volunteer, I know in my heart that I have done something good with at least a little bit of my life," Sheppard says.

Sharing Spirit in the Community

Daniel Vogel, a senior at Buchholz High in Gainesville, leads and learns at the same time. As president of Student Council, he serves as the main liaison between students and the administration and faculty. He also serves as president of the Spanish Club, National Honor Society, and Mu Alpha Theta (math club). And he volunteers at religious schools and as a summer counselor.

Vogel says one of his most rewarding volunteering experiences was at a local retirement home where he and fellow Student Council members participated in a pep rally for residents. "At first, it seemed that no matter how much we cheered, the residents really didn't care that we were there," Vogel says. "However, as it went along, we could see the residents were having just as much fun. They just showed their enthusiasm

in a different way." The pep rally included a lesson from a 102-year-old woman about staying physically fit, which was a highlight of the event, Vogel says. "When we finished," says Vogel, "everyone got chills because we realized how much it meant to the residents."

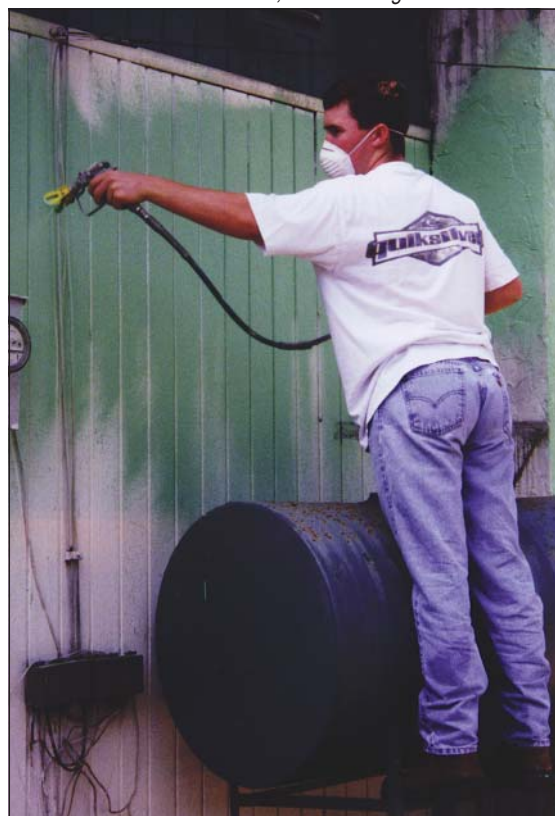
In the past, Vogel has raised money for charities, secured coats for children, and acquired cans of food for the needy. He says he also has participated in walks for charity. Vogel says he enjoys the counselor volunteer role he plays in the community. Through Student Council, he has led numerous programs at Buchholz. He also tutors math through his involvement in Mu Alpha Theta.

Vogel says volunteering has helped to make him a better leader because of the skills he has learned. "[For] all of the programs I have led, I had to speak in front of an entire auditorium," Vogel says. "At camp, I had to look after sometimes 15 to 20 kids at a time."

At first, volunteering seems like just another thing that needs to be completed before graduation, Vogel says. "However, volunteering is much more, especially if you find an opportunity that has things to offer to you," he says. "Returns from volunteering are not physical or monetary benefits but personal benefits. When you volunteer and really make a difference, there is just a feeling of joy because you know you did something special."

Learn more about these volunteering opportunities: ManaTEEN at www.manateens.org, American Red Cross at www.redcross.org, United Way at national.unitedway.org, S.A.V.E. at www.appstate.edu, Special Olympics at www.specialolympics.org.

Lakewood Ranch High's Mike Monaghan participates in the PaintTEEN event of ManaTEEN, a club serving Southwest Florida.



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