

Group Travels to San Antonio Over Spring Break to SERVE!

By Lance Meyer

While most students went south to relax on the beach or did nothing for a week here in Minnesota, a group of 13 students and two staff leaders traveled to San Antonio, Texas, over Spring Break to volunteer. The opportunity was made possible in cooperation with the national organization DOOR, Discovering Opportunities for Outreach and Reflection, which provided accommodation for the group and opportunities to serve. Throughout the week, the group worked in 3 different soup kitchens, helped out in a group home for the disabled, framed a house with Habitat for Humanity, got involved in an inter-city youth program, and served at one of the city's food banks.

"Service learning trips are so important because they help us turn our focus away from ourselves and to everyone else out there," reflected Concordia freshman Nicole Decker who participated in the service opportunity. "It really meant a lot to these people that we gave up our spring break to go down and serve them."

One day, the group volunteered in San Antonio's largest soup kitchen where it helped prepare and serve breakfast and lunch to members of the community in need. "The most rewarding part of the trip for me was when I helped prepare meals at a soup kitchen and saw all the people come through and get food," said Decker who added, "it was especially rewarding when they smiled and thanked us."

As mentioned, the group also had the opportunity to work with Habitat for Humanity for a day. "The very first Habitat chapter was in San Antonio, and today it is the second largest in the United States," said Service Learning Director Kelly Dotson who expressed the important role the organization plays in the community. "We could tell that we were helping people, just by looking at what we had accomplished," said Concordia freshman Heather Huckstadt. "After working at Habitat for Humanity for a day, we had framed an entire house."

Besides participating in hands-on service activities, the group got a taste of a culture very unlike what people were used to. Dotson, who organized and led the trip, set up speakers for two different nights who talked to the group about immigration and Latino culture. "I didn't realize San Antonio is the 7th largest city in

the United States or that 65% of its people are Latino," said Dotson who found the cultural experience in itself to be very rewarding for the group.

Part of the group also traveled across the border to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, for a day. With the current drug-related violence taking place near the border, this opportunity allowed the group to learn first-hand about Mexican culture, immigration, and drug-trafficking. "Our guide grew up in Nuevo Laredo, and his brother was shot by the Texas militia in the 1960s as he tried to swim back into Mexico from the United States where he had been trafficking drugs," said Dotson. "His story made all of it much more real."

"I really enjoyed the day trip to Mexico because I love learning about other cultures," added Huckstadt. "It was humbling to go to a border town where people have basically nothing but are still content."

Besides the service component of the trip, the group took part in a couple tourist activities during the week. "We visited the Alamo where people from all over the world participated in a battle reenactment, and we also did San Antonio's famous river walk one day," said Dotson who expressed the importance of the trip as a team building experience. When asked if she would recommend such a trip to other students,

Huckstadt replied, "I would definitely recommend it! It's such an opportunity for growth, both as a person and as a community. I think everyone really learned a lot, but we had a lot of fun too!" The good thing is Dotson hopes interested students have several opportunities to take part in such a rewarding experience in the future. "We are planning on sending out three service trips over Spring Break next year with trained student leaders," said Dotson. Applications will be available after Easter Break for students interested in being trained as service trip leaders.

"One of my teammates encouraged us to find our passion," said Decker who went on to add a challenge for all members of the Concordia community. "Not everyone feels called to build a house or go to a foreign country, but what you should do is find out what ways you are called to serve and act accordingly." Several students answered the call recently and served the people of Fargo by helping with flood preparation. Now it is time for the rest of Concordia's students, faculty, and staff to step up and answer their call to serve.



The group stops in the Ozarks on the way to Texas

Biannual Italy Trip Reintroduced

By Lance Meyer

Concordia is continuing to take steps in the right direction when it comes to offering more off-campus activities and opportunities to travel abroad. The history and art departments in cooperation have just announced that they plan to take a group of students to Europe in January of 2010, a trip that has not been offered for the past two years.

For two weeks during winter break, history professor Thomas Saylor and art professors Cate Vermeland and Alonso Sierralta will lead a group of students through Italy to the historic cities of Venice, Florence, Pisa, and Rome. "This Global Studies program represents a unique learning experience, a chance to walk along centuries old streets and canals; see cultural treasures; and feel the trauma of early Christians as you walk through the dimly lit Saint Callixtus Catacombs in Rome," said Saylor in the trip's information flyer.

The trip will be open to students from all levels of study at Concordia, and uniquely, students will be able to earn credits during the two week trip. Both general education credits as well as upper-level courses will be offered in collaboration with the trip. "Students can satisfy required Gen-Ed credits for Approaching Art or Western Civilization," said Saylor. "Also two credit courses for upper-level students



will be offered in photography, art history, and topics in history." Since students can take up to 19 credits with no additional cost, taking a couple extra credits in January will not increase tuition costs for the following semester.

According to Saylor, more and more students are expressing a desire for greater access to study abroad programs. Even though he and other interested faculty members have not been able to establish a permanent office for off-campus studies yet, reintroducing the winter Italy trip is a step in the right direction for Concordia in providing students with the opportunities they deserve.

"If you are ready to stretch the boundaries of the traditional classroom and embrace an on-site approach to learning, then the Italy Tour 2010 could be for you," stressed Saylor. If interested, students can visit the trip's website blog which is ready to go with information and application forms, look for posters throughout campus, watch for a tunnel table, or contact any of the trip's leaders. If you are one of the students who has been disappointed with Concordia's offerings of off-campus study options, the 2010 Italy Trip might be the opportunity you have been waiting for; take advantage of it.