

1-2005

Partners in Community Service

William Lucci

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slcepartnerships>

 Part of the [Service Learning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lucci, William, "Partners in Community Service" (2005). *Partnerships/Community*. 49.
<http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slcepartnerships/49>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Barbara A. Holland Collection for Service Learning and Community Engagement (SLCE) at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Partnerships/Community by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.



Partners in Community Service

Making a community connection is part of "The Stafford Way" at Vermont's Stafford Technical Center

by William Luccl, Jr.

Take a stroll through the hallways of Stafford Technical Center (STC) in Rutland, Vermont, and you'll hear the sounds and conversations that you would expect to find in a population of 250 teenagers. Topics like music ... dating ... teachers ... work ... and proms. But well after the corridors grow silent for the day, you can still hear the mantra and sense the feelings that have become an important part of the work of every student, teacher and administrator at Stafford Technical Center.

Operating with a mission statement that proudly touts its desire to "create a learning environment that promotes pride in work, a sense of self-worth and

the ability to respect others by developing effective communication and life skills," Stafford acknowledges that these learning experiences don't necessarily occur within the four walls of the traditional school classroom. Community service, service learning, helping out—call it what you will, but this initiative has become an important part of the curriculum of Stafford Technical Center.

But while some service learning projects are planned and placed into the curriculum before the start of the school year, others just happen. Take for example the wood splitter that was designed and built by Kevin Corkins and Jim Patry, who lead the Power Mechanics and Welding program at Stafford. According to Corkins, the idea evolved when he was cleaning out his barn with Patry, his para-educator and friend.

"I asked Jim if he knew of anyone who could use an I beam," says Corkins, "and he suggested that we make a splitter out of it for a family he knew who needed a hand."

So brainstorming together with the 14 students in the program, Corkins and Patry used the beam and other materials they had collected over the last 20 years to design and fabricate a piece of useable equipment for a local family that had some financial difficulties due to some unexpected medical expenses they incurred.

Black River High School graduate Jason Turco was one of several students who made the project a reality. According to Turco, he did some welding on the axle and frame, but the project provided him with much more than an opportunity to polish his welding skills. "It taught me to look at

manufacturing in a different way,"

Turco explains. "This project made one good machine out of a bunch of old parts, and we helped out a family by giving them something they could really use."

Stafford Technical Center Director Lyle Jepson shares the pride about this and the well over 60 other projects that were completed for needy private citizens and budget-strapped not-for-profit agencies in the greater Rutland community during the school year. And a quick look at the list of the many other projects Stafford students tackled during the school year is impressive indeed.

Says Jepson, "Stafford students recognize the significant impact that they can make in the community in which they live. Their efforts on behalf of their communities are a reflection of their dedication to both their personal growth and the continued vitality in the region in which they may live and work for the rest of their lives."

Making a Mark on the Community

While there is a common sense of purpose for all of Stafford's service learning projects, each program has the flexibility to provide opportunities for students that are in step with the unique focus of their program at STC. But leaving its own unique mark in the community service initiative requires tackling projects that require the blend of skills and ingenuity that makes each program so unique. For instance, helping children through a variety of projects was high on the agenda of both the Human Services and Office Technology programs last year. Program Instructor Chris Pietryka and nine students in her Office Technology program put together gift bags of personal clothing for children who were



staying at a local shelter last Christmas.

According to Pietryka, this agency was contacted because she was told that kids loved getting an unopened package of socks or underwear. "So we all went out and purchased these items for every kid at the shelter," says Pietryka.

Not wanting kids to be disappointed during the holidays motivated Lee Forte's students in Human Services to "adopt" a child and then provide wrapped presents for that child through the Wal-Mart Christmas Tree program, making Christmas a much more memorable one for the child.

Taking care to spread their "gifts" at strategic times throughout the school year, Forte's students found another learning opportunity after a field trip connected her program with the Maclure Library staff in Pittsford. According to Forte, she was asked to see if there were any students available to provide "meaningful" child care for preschoolers whose parents were participating in their own reading hour at the local library. Without missing a

beat, several students jumped at the chance to do something that was both educationally relevant and personally rewarding.

Forte is quick to point out that, for students in her program, the chance to give something back to the community comes up all the time. Since the program operates its own literature-based preschool as a critical part of the Human Services curriculum during the school year, Forte and her students are staunch supporters of any opportunity that promotes reading readiness for kids.

Caitlin Wolven, a Rutland High School senior who was enrolled as a student in Forte's program, says the opportunity at Maclure seemed like something she could embrace because, "I could give something back to the community doing something that was meaningful to me. Since I'm looking at early childhood education as a possible career, I enjoyed reading to the kids. And it was a great experience helping them learn to read at the same time."

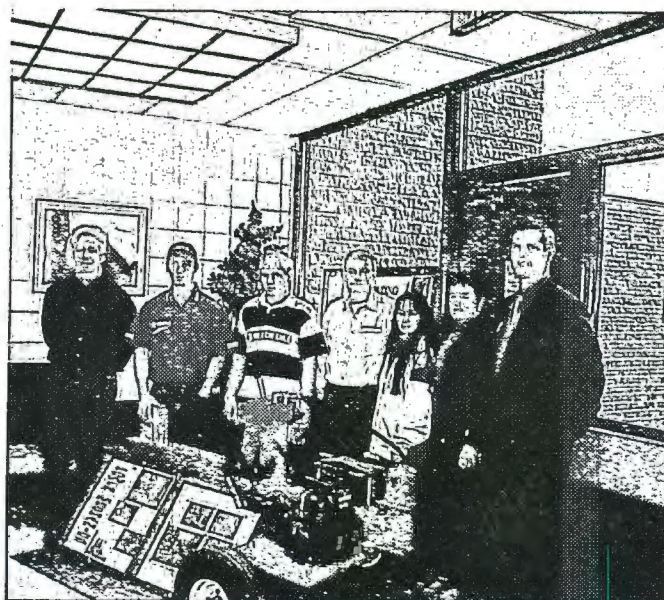
Forte also points out that they con-

tributed a puppet theater and small climbing block to the Vermont Achievement Center after visiting the local school for a field trip. Not having the space available for the theater and climbing block in their own preschool program for 20 local children ages three to five, Forte says that she and her students were "only too happy to find a good home for these learning tools at VAC."

Amy Dunkerley, a second-year Stafford student and senior at Rutland High School, found these volunteer opportunities to be a very rewarding part of her curriculum in the Human Services program at Stafford. "No matter what kind of day I was having, the smiles on the faces of the children put a smile on my face," Dunkerley comments. "Being with them became the best part of my day."

Building a Tradition of Service

Most area residents know that Stafford's Carpentry program has been



building houses for the Rutland region for many years. But, oddly enough, there were two other programs that constructed habitats—but not for humanity—last year. For the second time in as many years, Culinary Arts students have made a gingerbread house as a part of their curriculum, with a raffle being held to give the proceeds to a deserving charity during the Christmas holidays.

"This past year we heard that donations to the Food Shelf were really low, so we thought that a cash donation would be a great help to them," says Chef Barry Ferraro, who with assistant K. T. McShane directs the Culinary program at Stafford. Both note that the \$100 that was raised and donated to the Rutland Community Cupboard as a result of their efforts teaches two important lessons to their kids—lessons that are expressed enthusiastically by Culinary student Scot Jenson: "Think about it ... building a homestead out of cookies for a worthy cause is a pretty cool thing."

A senior at Rutland High School, Jenson explains that, for him, an added bonus of participating in this project was that, "It provided me with an opportunity to be creative—thinking outside the box using my culinary skills."

Providing assistance to those in need didn't end with the area's human population, as even Mother Nature was on Stafford's list to receive a helping

hand. Mark Skakel, instructor for the Forestry, Horticulture and Natural Resources program, and his students donated their time and abundant energy over three days to plant 200 oak seedlings for the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife last fall in a cut-over area in Pittsfield.

According to Skakel, two colleagues who are wildlife biologists approached him about tackling this project because it would be an improvement to the habitat. "An added bonus was that the project connected nicely to what they were learning in my program," says Skakel.

Students learned much more than how to properly plant a tree by participating in this venture. "We learned that acorns are a good food source for turkey, bear and deer," explains one student. "It's pretty wild to think that what we were planting today would be providing food in a couple of years to a whole population of wild animals out there."

The housing piece was provided through a joint effort between Skakel's crew and the students in Jeff Fowler's Cabinet Making program. According to Fowler, this was the second time in as many years that his and Skakel's programs collaborated to construct 70 birdhouses. Many of these houses were donated to the Rutland Natural Resources Conservation District (RNRCD) after they were approached

by Nancy Maguire, who needed to have them for a fundraising event.

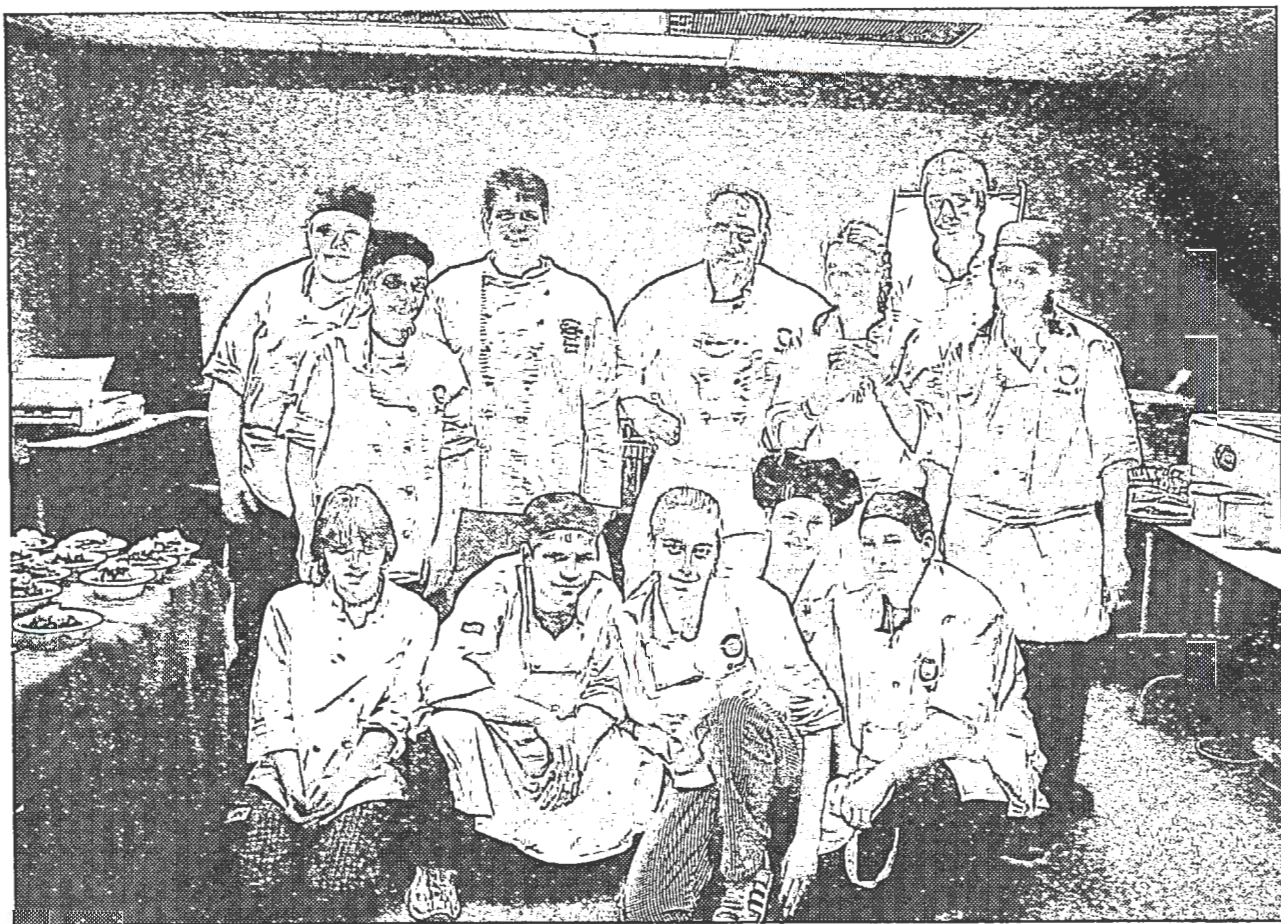
"What started out as a nice mid-winter project to help out the RNRCD benefited us in several ways," says Skakel.

Students even took the time to construct a few extra houses and have put them around Stafford and Rutland High School, and several of them have now become homes for some wrens and finches. An additional bonus, according to both instructors, was the lesson in teamwork that it taught to students in both programs.

The Cabinet Making students took the lead in assisting the kids in Forestry to learn how to safely and effectively use the equipment in their program area. Local business leaders are quick to point out that they want their employees to understand how important both personal development and social responsibility are in the workplace. Skills like cooperation and interpersonal communication are key pieces of the STC curriculum, and teachers across the board acknowledge that it is much easier to reinforce these skills when students can practice them in the "real world" environment that Stafford programs can provide.

Making a Difference in the World

For the most part, these efforts have impacted one organization or agency at



a time, but at least two projects have affected people in a global way—one at the international level. A good example of a local project that had a global impact was undertaken by the Carpentry program. Instructor Steve Steigerwald and his class assumed a high-visibility project for greater Rutland when they fabricated, installed and later removed those familiar United Way thermometers that pop up in four strategic locations throughout the city during peak solicitation times. Says Steigerwald, "This is a great project that we have continued to do over the past 12 years. It's a great way for the kids to develop some basic finishing skills, because it has to look attractive, plumb and square. And it really does teach the kids a lot about the United Way and the many agencies it serves."

Perhaps one of the most silent acts of goodwill and generosity of Stafford students reaches halfway across the world. After an exchange trip that he, Chef Barry Ferraro and Director of Guidance

Lori Cillo made to China in 2002, Stafford Technical Center Director Lyle Jepson returned to the United States determined to assist students in accessing technical education in that country.

Believe it or not, the annual cost of a technical education in China is a mere \$125, but it is the responsibility of the individual families to finance the educations of their children. Lori Cillo notes that, while families sacrifice much to give their children a chance to get an education, the cost of tuition, which is a pittance by U.S. standards, represents a sizeable chunk of the annual income for the average Chinese family.

Recording their experience in a PowerPoint slideshow, the three educators presented it to the student body at its first assembly of the year. Stafford students and faculty took it from there by collecting spare change and conducting a few small fundraisers throughout the year. The nearly \$625 collected by Stafford students and staff from Hospitality, Culinary

Arts, Technical English and Forestry has subsidized the cost of educating five students from Kunming province in southern China. Students who have contributed are amazed that, with just a few dollars, they can have an impact on the world community.

Cillo notes that, "It certainly made our students aware of just how connected we are, even to people who live halfway around the world."

Jepson agrees, adding that, "We hope that as our students pursue their chosen careers, they will continue to be significant contributors both to the communities in which they live and the economy of the Rutland region. And as educators, we're proud of Stafford's role in making that a possibility." @

William Lucci, Jr. is curriculum coordinator for Stafford Technical Center in Rutland, Vermont. He can be reached at wlucci@rutlandhs.k12.vt.us. For more information about Stafford Technical Center, visit www.staffordonline.org.