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THE ENQUIRER

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NKU students rehab house

As part of a spring break program

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COVINGTON -

In past years, many Northern Kentucky University students traveled to rural Mexico as part of an annual service learning class where they helped build communities by improving infrastructure.

This year, a group of eight students stayed closer to home: Covington's west side.

"The reason that I started looking for a project in Northern Kentucky was to help localize the project for students," said Margaret Stevens, director of service learning programs at the Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement. She said many students can't go on international trips because of time or money.

The students worked with the Center for Great Neighborhoods of Covington, a non-profit community development organization. The week included rehabbing a home to be more energy-efficient, helping with painting projects, attending community meetings and working with teens at the center's MicroEnterprise program.

Gabe Cronon, a junior speech communication major from Erlanger, joined the class because he wanted to do something positive during spring break.

"I took away a new-found idea of what civic engagement and community service means," said Cronon. "It gave me a view of people who are dedicated to their community and how hard they work. I will take away the idea of continual service and giving back to my community."

Ben Savage, community development specialist at the Center for Great Neighborhoods, said the students provided much-needed labor but also got a different perspective on urban life.

"I think the week sensitized them to some of the unique struggles of urban life and the unique character of an older urban core neighborhood," Savage said. "I think they saw the value in that and how there's a balance with the struggles of urban life as well as the benefits of urban life - being able to walk around the corner to a coffee shop, proximity to work, and the close connection to the community that develops."

Stevens said another benefit of working locally is that the students can continue the relationships they developed during spring break.

"The eight students who participated in this class will continue to work in their home communities or Covington, interacting with community leaders and completing other reading/writing assignments."

Maureen Wash is studying organizational leadership. She said she'll be back for several events over the next few months including the Great American Clean Up on April 26.

"One thing that I learned about leadership this past week in Covington is that it takes all kinds of people to lead a community to successful completion of projects," Wash said. "Once the vision is shared, they are all on board with what needs to happen and how each one of them participates in the outcome. Together they will accomplish great things, and I believe that Covington will be a great place to live and work in the future."

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