

NEWS RELEASE

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Rugged Mountains Reap Humbling Rewards for Eight Saint Mary Students *Students Use Spring Break to Renovate Homes in Rural Kentucky*

(Leavenworth, Kan.)— In an era where flocking to Cancun or the beaches of Florida has become the spring break norm, eight University of Saint Mary students discovered taking the “road less traveled” can be just as rewarding. Instead of lounging on remote beaches, the students traveled to the Appalachian Mountains in Kentucky to renovate homes for the Christian Appalachian Project’s Work Fest 2005.

Joni Aukerman, Ben Grubb, Brenton Jayatilaka, Zach Logan, Rebecca Muder, Stephanie Ruble, Angie Shehan and Jeff Swanson learned a thing or two about service, construction and team work during their March 19-24 spring break trip. Each student did their part by patching roofs, siding, installing drywall and indoor plumbing and replacing floors, steps and porches for eight homes in rural Kentucky.

Substandard housing is a significant problem in this portion of the Bluegrass State. Work Fest brings volunteers together to renovate and reconstruct dilapidated homes. The Christian Appalachian Project connects students and volunteers from around the United States with Appalachian families in need of home repairs. In just three weeks, students from 38 colleges and universities joined together to repair 16 homes.

Aukerman will always remember Kentucky. In fact, her most recent trek to the rugged Appalachians was her second. During her first trip two years ago, she helped construct a brand new house from scratch. This year, she helped renovate a home that was partially destroyed by fire. She wouldn’t suggest, however, which she enjoyed the most. “I honestly enjoyed both trips,” she said. “I didn’t think one was better than the other—they were both well organized. My motives (for participating) are a bit selfish. I get as much from helping the people in need as they get from me. It’s a wonderful experience for everyone.”

Jayatilaka, a native of Lesmurdie, Australia, said this trip was unlike any other in his life. While he admits he did not expect much, Jayatilaka got much more than he bargained for. In fact, he would love to head to eastern Kentucky again next year. “As far as spring break goes, I don’t think I could’ve planned a better trip,” he said.

Jayatilaka worked with others to renovate what he called a poorly constructed house. Challenged by an un-level foundation and cardboard-like walls, Jayatilaka said the family his group helped definitely appreciated the hard work. “We got the desired affect,” Jayatilaka said. “As we progressed through the week, the family we worked with began to pick up self-esteem. That’s the most amazing part. The community taught us more about charity and humility than we could ever offer them. It was just a great experience all around.”

The University of Saint Mary alternative spring break trips are sponsored by Campus Ministry and the Service-Learning Office. This is the third consecutive year Saint Mary students have participated in Work Fest. A separate group of students will travel to San Lucas Toliman, Guatemala in June to help build a community center. The community center will be constructed in just over one week.

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