

District Newsletter

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Sylvia Plourde
District Governor 2009-2010

December is the month to celebrate Family. It's a very busy month for everyone-getting ready for the Holidays-completing last minute shopping for gifts and preparing wonderful meals to share with family and friends.

We are so very fortunate to live in a country where there is so much abundance even in difficult economic times. There are those in other countries whose lives are filled with hardship with not even the basic necessities for survival. It is at this time that we need to remind ourselves of the impact we have on those less fortunate with our international projects and heartfelt deeds for they will not go unnoticed.

Rotarians are so very generous in their communities especially during the Holiday Season. We know how to share and give of

ourselves-our time, our energy, our helping hands-to those who need us. We help clothe and feed and uplift the spirits of those around us. WE ARE ALL FAMILY and the greatest gift of all is to teach our young the joy of giving. That is why this month's article is from the Rotaract Club of Farmington. What this young club is doing for families in the community is nothing short of miraculous.

I wish you the Best Holiday ever! Be proud of being a Rotarian as you are changing lives-one at a time. God Bless!

Sylvia Plourde, DG

UMF student club thrives on community service

Bobbie Hanstein with the Daily Bulldog

FARMINGTON - As University of Maine at Farmington students enter their week of finals, one group on campus can look back on their fall semester as one of eye-opening experiences and accomplishment.

UMF's Rotaract Club has tripled its membership this semester as more and more students are signing up to help build a house for the Habitat for Humanity program or collect toys for children admitted to Franklin Memorial Hospital or provide gifts through the Operation Santa Claus program at Western Maine Community Action.

"It's really exciting to see the students' enthusiasm

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1

for helping,” said Alison Terry, a UMF psychology assistant professor who serves as the club’s advisor.

Amanda Reibel, president of the UMF Rotaract Club, gave thumbs up to her experience with the university community service group on the Auburn Habitat for Humanity construction site. (UMF photo)

Rotaract, an affiliate of the Rotary International, is a service club for young men and women ages 18 to 30 and can be either community or university based. Terry, got her Rotary Club start as a teenager when she was a member of the Interact Club, a high school affiliate with Rotary International. Through the club’s sponsorship, her attendance at a leadership conference and as an exchange student in high school were accomplished.

Now Terry is UMF’s Rotaract Club advisor, who is quick to credit this year’s new Rotaract officers at UMF with igniting the club’s activity and boosting new membership.

UMF’s Rotaract Club president, Amanda Reibel, got it all going when she posted on the school’s Web site that help was needed for a Habitat for Humanity housing construction project in Auburn. In no time, where there were once six club members became 20. Twenty students ready to help build a house even though they had never done anything like that before.

“None of us had ever worked in construction,” Reibel said. On the first trip this fall, the house was framed and work on the roof had begun when they arrived to help. After some instruction, the UMF students, working with Bates College students and community volunteers, learned on the job how to build a house from the ground up.

“We were given instruction and then it was up to us to problem solve it. It was a good experience. A lot of girls started by saying ‘I can’t do this’ but then found out they could,” Reibel said. Experience included working the big power saw, roofing and siding the building.

The house is being constructed for a young family of seven who are currently living in a small, two-bedroom home. The house is expected to be completed in February, with UMF students returning after winter break to help with the finish work.

The experience not only taught construction skills, but has also connected the students to an underprivileged family in need of help.



Students in the UMF Rotaract Club committed their time and talents recently at the Auburn Habitat for Humanity building site where they helped to build a home for an area family. (UMF photo)

Continued on page 3



Amanda Reibel, president of the UMF Rotaract Club, gave thumbs up to her experience with the university community service group on the Auburn Habitat for Humanity construction site. (UMF photo)

“It was eye-opening for me,” Reibel said. “You don’t think about how bad things are for people.” The father of the family worked alongside the students and told them their help was “so great.”

“He told us people are showing them that they care and that they are a part of the community,” Reibel said.

Another club project, working to help out with Operation Santa Claus was an eye-opener too. The UMF club members set up a table every-day at lunch time at the cafeteria entrance and asked students and staff to help fulfill requests made through the Operation Santa Claus program. The club passed out tags that included a child’s or a senior’s age, gender and a toy, clothes or other item needed. Those choosing to participate, picked up a tag, went to purchase the item and brought it back to the club’s table for delivery to the North Pole, also known as WMCA’s office in East Wilton.

It was the nature of the tag requests, Reibel said, that really struck her. An elderly woman requested a bath towel.

A teenager asked for blank CDs or computer paper. “They were all basic needs, things that are easy to get here. A 14-year-old

who needs computer paper, that’s what got me.”

So far, the club has filled 57 of the 60 tag requests. “There was a huge turnout to help,” Reibel said. “It says a lot about UMF students, most of whom are on a limited budget, and the staff, too, who really helped out.”

If that weren’t enough, the club has collected toys to donate to Franklin Memorial Hospital for children who may need a little cheer during their stay and has put together small care packages that will be given to Sexual Assault Victims Emergency Services for those victims needing temporary shelter and a few personal items for the stay. The students also participated in the Rotary’s Festival of Trees event held on Chester Greenwood Day by decorating a tree that fetched \$499. With those funds, the club has decided to sponsor a child in Guatemala through the Safe Passage program.

“It’s been exciting for me to see,” Terry said of the club’s community service help. Reibel said they will be having a brainstorm session soon to decide what they’ll be doing in the spring semester. “They can see the results and look with pride on what they’ve done,” Terry added.

