

Giving Back Gives Student Money for College

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Volunteering has been a part of Hanna LaRochelle's life for as long as she can remember. She does it because she realizes how lucky she is; because she believes in giving back. Never once did she think of it as a way to earn money for college. And yet, it has.

Last fall, an essay on helping to build houses for hurricane victims in Louisiana and a playing field for a small school in the hill town of Somoto, Nicaragua, won LaRochelle a \$1,000 scholarship.

A sociology major who wants to teach elementary school, LaRochelle placed third in the second annual National Student Day contest sponsored by the National Association of College Stores to promote and honor social responsibility among college students.

More than 170 students from across North America and Canada entered the contest, submitting stories about their volunteering experiences. The top three entries received scholarships LaRochelle, who is active in the UNH community service groups Aspiring Hands and Circle K, recounted that while in high school, she spent February vacations volunteering in Louisiana, and then, during her junior year, traveled with her family to work with the Fabretto Children's Foundation in Somoto.

"Somoto is a very, very poor community. You can't even call the homes shacks," the UNH sophomore says of the town that was once home to the Aztecs. "We all stayed in a little cottage. The family next door just had four concrete walls, just that. And yet, every morning, the mother was out sweeping the dirt."

Many of the children have to drop out of school to help their families, a reality that stuck with LaRochelle, reminding her again of how fortunate she is.

LaRochelle says. "After being somewhere like Nicaragua, you really realize how well off you are. To see that kind of poverty is shocking." "Growing up Windham, one of the richest towns in New Hampshire, and then seeing the contrast of life in Somoto was incredible. My family's not rich but we have enough," LaRochelle says. "After being somewhere like Nicaragua, you really realize how well off you are. To see that kind of poverty is shocking." In her essay, LaRochelle wrote, "Completing all of these things throughout my life has given me a sense of independence, given me the confidence I needed, and made me realize doing something small in life can make a huge difference in the long run."

"Volunteering helps me to get in touch with a different side of myself," she says. "I've learned to take nothing for granted."

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