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Media Contact: Jody Record
603-862-1462
UNH Media Relations

Dec 15, 2009

DURHAM, N.H. – The season of giving exists all year long at the University of New Hampshire. More than 80 percent of students who come to UNH report having performed community service at some time in the year prior to entering college. And that service doesn’t stop when they get here.

During 2009, approximately 3,500 UNH students logged more than 85,000 volunteer hours through 20-plus organizations, doing everything from raising money to fight cancer to increasing awareness about homelessness to helping to build houses in New Orleans.

The billable hours for such work would total more than $1.7 million.

“When you put a dollar amount on it, you say ‘wow,’” says Marianne Fortescue, Office of Community Service and Learning. “That really makes it visible to people.”

Through the Office of Community Service and Learning, students are encouraged to volunteer locally as a way to connect with their community as well as with state and national organizations. The department helps students make connections with groups that reflect their interests. Most students volunteer between three to five hours a week.

Since her first year at UNH, Michelle Pizzillo has been volunteering with Alternative Break Challenge, a UNH student organization that provides community service opportunities during spring break.

“My philosophy on volunteering is that it’s important to look back on the community you live in and try to think of how you can contribute or give back in a sense,” says Pizzillo, a senior majoring in recreation management and policy. “It’s through these experiences that you really learn a lot about yourself, your abilities, relationships, and how you can make the world we live in today a little bit better just from something as little as an hour per month.”

Pizzillo has been on the executive board of ABC for four years. One year she traveled to Cumberland Island in Georgia to help restore the national seashore, and, another year, to work on the Georgia section of the Appalachian Trail.

Communication major Lynette Boutin helped co-found Giovanni’s Team, a group that promotes and hosts bone marrow drives throughout the year.

“The work we do is important, and we do a lot of it,” Boutin says. “Students are saving lives by participating in bone marrow drives.”

And they help raise money to help save lives as well; the UNH Relay for Life chapter recently received an award from the American Cancer Society for the amount of money students raised. In April, the 118 teams raised more than $133,000.
“All of the students are so committed to what they do,” Fortescue says. “That commitment drives them to get involved. And that, in turn, spurs other students to do the same.”

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

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