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CAMPUS NEWS

Gardner-Webb Honors Students Participate in cleanup of New River in West Jefferson, N.C.

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON SEPTEMBER 30, 2021



While Pulling Tires and Other Objects Out of the River, Students Build Relationships

Written By Claire Allen, '22, Intern for Communications

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—This semester marked the return of the “Big Sweep,” an annual camping and retreat trip held by the Gardner-Webb University Honors Student Association (HSA) reminiscent of the national Beach Sweep. For more than two decades, Honors Students have partnered with organizations such as New River Conservancy in West Jefferson, N.C., New River State Park, Zaloo’s Canoes, Ashe County Administration, and New River Outfitters to cleanup local waterways.

As part of the efforts, volunteers “adopt” portions of waterways, much like how groups can adopt highways for trash pickup. Over the course of the weekend, students traveled the New River in canoes during the day, picking up any materials they could find. At night, they set up camp where they bundled up by a campfire, roasted marshmallows, and made friends with other attendees.

Dr. Tom Jones, director of the Honors Program, said about the event, “Our crew has typically ‘adopted’ three to four sections of the New River covering 12-14 miles. Though the nationwide program has been restricted due to COVID, the folks at New River know that our crew would still be interested and chomping at the bit after missing last year.”

When asked how, if at all, the event had changed over the years, Abbey Hudson, '23, of Morganton, N.C., stated, “I attended this event in 2019, it was one of the best experiences I have ever had. This year I would say was a little different due to the age of COVID. I am grateful that we got to attend this event

even in this age. I appreciate everything Dr. Jones does for us students and what he continues to do for us.”



▲ Photos by Meredith Bridges

Students had a variety of reasons for wanting to attend this event. For Samantha Holt, '25, from Mebane, N.C., it was about helping the environment and undoing harm that had been done to the ecosystem. Jade Baubant, a French Teacher's Assistant (TA), saw it as a way to meet new people while helping the planet.

Upon returning, one of the most common questions asked of the participants is some variation of, “What was the most unusual thing you found?” Answers included a wetsuit, a door, a stove, and many, many tires.



Despite the heat, the labor-intensive work, and the cold water, students viewed the “Big Sweep” as a success, both in physical results and in emotional ones. While the purpose was to serve the community by caring for the environment, Jenissa Schleifenheimer, a senior biology major from Birdsboro, Pa., Anna-Kate Schiebel, '25, from Asheboro, N.C., and Lydia Mount, '23, from Statesville, N.C., also shared that the experience also provided an opportunity to make new friends and strengthen relationships.

Overall, it seems that everyone involved had a great time, and although the presence of three alumni over the weekend shows that the efforts don't stop at graduation, those not graduating look forward to participating next year.

Claire Allen is a senior English major from Salisbury, North Carolina. She greatly enjoys both reading and writing, and is a consultant at the Writing Center, a Writing Fellow, and president of Sigma Tau Delta.

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