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Combining Service and Reflection

By Stan Zygmunt

For Clare Strockbine, service is a driving force that has shaped who she is and who she will become. After graduation in 2004, Strockbine plans to volunteer in Latin America for a year, becoming part of The University of Scranton's rich tradition of service. Since 1986, a total of 263 graduates have chosen full-time volunteer service over employment.

Though she simply calls it "living her faith," in her four years at Scranton, her legacy will ripple through the University for years to come.

A confident leader always juggling multiple projects, Strockbine wished the University included a larger component of community service as part of its orientation. Rather than sit idly by, she did something about it.

In 2003, Strockbine initiated a program called FIRST (Freshmen Involved in Reflective Service Together). The reflective service immersion program involved incoming freshman students in service at eight Scranton area sites over a four-day period prior to fall move-in. The program also included daily reflection, the component she considers paramount.

"Service doesn't end after three hours of work in a soup kitchen," says Strockbine. "Students can often quickly see the immediate effect their service has on community, but they don't see as clearly the effect it has on them."

For that reason, each evening FIRST participants gathered to reflect and incorporate their experiences into social justice themes.

"Service continues in every part of their life. The only way to see the incredible effect it has is through reflection," explains Strockbine.

The results of the FIRST program have already been noticed. "We have already seen the participants in FIRST develop into leaders," says Pat Vaccaro, director of the University's Center for



Clare Strockbine

Social Action and Service Initiatives.

Strockbine, from Stony Brook, N.Y., takes a self-effacing view of the program's success, quickly pointing to the broad university support she received and the "outstanding freshmen" who participated. After all, her motivation was not for herself, but to give incoming students an opportunity to serve.

A senior double majoring in Communications and Spanish, Strockbine saw her spiritual side develop at the University.

"I developed academically, emotionally, and socially, but most of my development was spiritual. The idea of living out my faith through service for others was the key factor that I learned at the University," says Strockbine.

Strockbine met her biggest influence during freshman seminar; her instructor and mentor, Pat Vaccaro.

"To call her a catalyst would not do her justice," said Strockbine. "A lot of my learning has taken place outside the classroom. The interpersonal connection here is significant."

Strockbine's first significant service project at the University was an alternative spring break trip during her freshman year. She worked with an Hispanic com-

munity in Williamston, N.C. This project left her wanting to do more.

Over her four years at the University, Strockbine served as an Orientation Assistant; a resident assistant; a member of campus ministry and the Justice Club; a volunteer for the Amigos Program, a tutoring and immersion program for ESL students; and for the Peace Makers Program, an educational anti-bullying campaign for middle school students.

Strockbine is a member of the Women's Leadership Delegation and co-chairs the Student Programming Board on Mission and Identity. She represented The University of Scranton at the National Jesuit Student Leadership Conference.

Each year, between 2,300 and 2,500 University of Scranton students serve as volunteers. In the 2002/2003 academic year alone, University students logged approximately 159,000 hours in volunteer service projects. In addition, The University of Scranton offers extended service programs during the summer, winter and spring breaks that provide service opportunities at Habitat for Humanity projects; at projects in inner cities, rural areas and Indian reservations; as well as international service opportunities.

After her year of service, Strockbine plans to return to The University of Scranton to pursue a master's degree in counseling.

"At The University of Scranton, I learned the idea of putting faith into action, to apply it to all aspects of my life, and to never be content. I know that I can always do more. We all have a calling to do as much as we can for others," says Strockbine.

Stan Zygmunt is Scranton University's manager of media relations.