



Stockton's Dr. Martin Luther King Day of Service Draws 1,000 from College and Communities

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Galloway Township, NJ - About 1,000 volunteers from The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and communities throughout South Jersey today honored the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. through community projects and social activism.

Stockton's 11th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Day of Service generated "the most community involvement ever," said Daniel Tomé, director of Service-Learning at the college.

To put it in perspective, "in the first year, we had about 70 people," said President Herman Saatkamp, who began Day of Service here in 2004. "Today we're approaching and maybe even going over 1,000 people at all the sites."

"What we're doing is building a community," he said.

Service projects took place at the main Galloway campus, the Carnegie Center in Atlantic City, Kramer Hall in Hammonton, the Manahawkin instructional site, the Sam Azeez Museum of Woodbine Heritage and at locations throughout the surrounding communities.

Students from area high schools including Atlantic City High School, Absegami High School, Cedar Creek High School, Egg Harbor Township High School, Galloway Township Middle School and Pleasantville Middle School were on campus to learn and to help.

"We have 50 students here today - the most we've ever brought," said Ed Friend, an English teacher at Absegami who advises the school's Interact club. "They love the fact that the college opens its doors to us and gives students the opportunity to serve the community."

The Absegami students were in the Campus Center helping to make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for distribution to the hungry, joining Stockton students from the Circle K, a student service organization affiliated with Kiwanis, and members of the Egg Harbor City Kiwanis club. At Stockton's nearby Newman Center, the Campus Religious Council also made sandwiches and greeting cards to be distributed to the homeless in Atlantic City.

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Melissa Zsitkovsky, of Rio Grande in Cape May County, helped pack canned goods as part of the Stockton Center for Community Engagement's food drive.

"I just like being of service," said the junior majoring in Social Work. She's a project leader at the center's Campus Kitchen at Atlantic City High School, which prepares and delivers 90-120 meals a week to families in Atlantic City and Absecon. Zsitkovsky also helps students at Stanley Holmes Village in Atlantic City with homework completion, an initiative of the center and the Atlantic City Police Department.

Among the dozens of other projects were cleanups at The Arc of Atlantic County, the Atlantic County Utilities Authority's greenhouse, the Noyes Museum of Art of Stockton College, the South Jersey Horse Rescue and a campus cleanup. Students also helped build a playground at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Galloway, distribute clothing through the Eastern Service Workers Association and teach CPR.

In Ocean County, students helped the Coastal Volunteers in Medicine in Barnegat and painted at the Tuckerton Seaport and Baymen's Museum. At Stockton's instructional site in Woodbine, Cape May County, a fire safety seminar was offered. Scores of volunteers at Hammonton's Kramer Hall helped with cleanups at the Eagle Theatre and the Hammonton Arts Center, made Valentine's cards for patients at the Greenbrier Nursing Home, provided support for Allies in Caring and offered CPR training.

Day of Service is hosted by the Office of the President, the Office of Service-Learning and the Office of Student Development with campus-wide support.

In celebrating Dr. King's birthday, speakers acknowledged that his fight is not over.

"Society is now more segregated than it was in the 1960s," President Saatkamp said, citing the economic divide between "the haves and the have-nots." He urged students "not to be silent about things that matter," quoting Dr. King.

This year marks the 50th anniversaries of the signing of the Voters Rights Act and the civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.

Brian Jackson, Stockton's chief of staff and co-chair of the event, told students to "think about those people who were beaten and killed fighting for the right to vote." When the next election rolls around, he said, "Get out and vote."

Dr. Adam Miyashiro, assistant professor of Literature who also teaches about cultural race theory, told a group at the #BlackLivesMatter teach-in that he was there to challenge their thinking.

"Martin Luther King was an enemy of the state," said Dr. Miyashiro, adding that the FBI persecuted him. "He was never a national hero" while he was alive. He added that Nelson Mandela "was still on the U.S. terrorist list in 2007, after winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993."

Manar Hussein, president of the Unified Black Students Society, organized the teach-in to give students more knowledge about race issues and civil rights.

"We can't expect people to know what's right if they don't have an understanding or have the time to be taught things," said Hussein, a senior from Mays Landing majoring in Literature and minoring in Africana Studies.

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She wants the UBSS to be inclusive, she said, and she wants all students to reflect on the uses of “power, poetry and peace.”

To be effective, students first need to understand politics and the power structure, she said, and second to learn how to express themselves through writing and the arts.

“There’s power in writing,” she said.

Lastly, her aim is peace: “After we vent creatively, we have to come up with what we’re going to do next for society. Activism is not just an event of marching - it’s daily, working to right wrongs. And that has a ripple effect.”

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