

500 Volunteers Tackle Projects on Civics, Environment, Health, Hunger and Homelessness

Stockton's 12th Day of Service Kicks Off Year of Community Engagement

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Galloway, NJ –Some 500 volunteers - students, faculty and staff from Stockton University - kicked off the university's year of learning today through community service projects ranging from voter registration, suicide prevention, water preservation, learning CPR, debating the death penalty and collecting books and food.

Stockton's 12th Day of Service focused on the themes of civics, the environment, health and wellness, and hunger and homelessness - and officials stressed that the point is to learn by doing for others, as a way of life.

"This is the first Day of Service as Stockton University. Today provides an opportunity for new and returning students to engage in the Stockton family," said Interim President Harvey Kesselman. "Engagement is critical to the Stockton community.... Make your service today, tomorrow, and forever."

"We want today to be a launching point for your service and civic engagement," said Jeff Wakemen, director of Student Development.

Stockton's WaterWatch gave a presentation on how the process of producing and drinking bottled water is harmful to the body and the environment, said Jia "Miki" Liang, president of the student group and a senior Biology major from Galloway.

Rick Dovey, president of the Atlantic County Utilities Authority, told students about the ACUA's recycling and trash operations, wastewater and sewage treatment plant, and its wind farm.

And he shared a personal note: "Forty-four years ago today, I was a member of the first graduating class of Stockton at the Mayflower Hotel in Atlantic City. I took my first class, 'The

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Eco-Politics of South Jersey,' and strangely enough, that has been my career - the eco-politics of South Jersey."

Dovey, who also chairs the Stockton University Foundation which raises funds for scholarships and other academic support, pointed out that the ACUA is a business with \$60 million in annual revenues. He said it has over 200 employees in many fields such as "engineering, human resources, finance - all the careers you are considering and opportunities for civic engagement."

Nursing major Elizabeth Grey, a senior from Buena Vista Township, NJ, was attending her second Day of Service. "It's very worthwhile to volunteer your services and get to know people and the environment in the community and see what you can do to help."

The Atlantic County Board of Elections provided a voting booth and voter registration as part of the civics and political engagement project. Tara Ronda of The Petey Greene Program of Princeton talked to students about tutoring prison inmates to help them get their GEDs.

"We wanted to engage students in the political process and we're focusing on discussion groups about the death penalty and the 4th Amendment - search and seizure issues," said student organizer Tim Schmidt, a senior Political Science major with a pre-law concentration from Berlin Township, NJ. "This is all tied in perfectly with Constitution Day on Sept. 16," Schmidt added, when Bryan Stevenson of the Equal Justice Initiative will speak about racial injustice and the Constitution.

Sophomores Jessica Packard of Shamong, NJ, Ryan Dever of Tabernacle, NJ and Chris Zeck of Franklinville, NJ helped make posters for Suicide Prevention Week, which is coming up Oct. 4-8 at Stockton.

"Today shows that small steps such as making a poster can make a big difference in someone else's life," said Dever. Suicide is a leading cause of death among young people and is preventable with treatment, organizers said.

This year's event featured a new format allowing volunteers to experience all activities. The Day of Service is sponsored by the Office of Service-Learning and Student Development.

Todd Bernstein, CEO of Global Citizen and founder and director of the Greater Philadelphia Martin Luther King Day of Service, was the keynote speaker.

"There's a national climate of division and constant political rancor," Bernstein said. "Hopes of a post-racial society have not been realized since President Obama's election. Dialogue has often been drowned out by yelling, epithets and an inability to teach consensus.

"Millennials want to find common sense solutions and common ground," he told students. "I am optimistic about our country because I am optimistic about you - a civic-minded, inclusive and empathetic generation. Millennials are the most diverse generation and are more tolerant of lifestyles and ethnic differences.

"Your generation offers us hope through active citizenship and because you are problem solvers," Bernstein said. "Stockton's partnership in the King Day of Service is a model for all colleges," he said. "But the key is turning one day into a lifetime of service."

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