Hunger Clean-Up and National Service Day: Once a volunteer, always a volunteer

By Robin Graham

It’s 7 a.m. on a Saturday in April. A group of students are gathering outside of Alumni Memorial Union, setting up tables, checking lists and organizing piles of rakes, shovels and other gardening tools. Father Andy Thon, S.J., vice president, student affairs — known as “S.J.-D.J.” this day — is blasting the Beatles’ “Good Day, Sunshine” from a sound system.

Dave Borgealt is assistant dean for community service programs in the Office of Student Development at Marquette. This is his second Hunger Clean-Up and although he’s present, it’s really the students who are running things.

“Students started this project 16 years ago,” says Borgealt, “and they’ve been running it ever since.”

Hunger Clean-Up is Marquette University’s campaign against hunger and homelessness in Milwaukee. Once part of the national Hunger Clean-Up campaign, Marquette students decided to run their own event so the money they raised would stay in Milwaukee.

One of Marquette’s fundraising service projects, Hunger Clean-Up also helps make the community a more beautiful place. In addition to serving at local meal programs, student teams paint fences, trim bushes, rake leaves — whatever their assigned work sites need.

Student teams raise money simply by asking friends, family or co-workers to pledge. The money collected is split among three social services agencies dedicated to helping those in need in Milwaukee.

“One great thing about Hunger Clean-Up is the leadership opportunity it exposes students to,” says Borgealt. One of those is choosing who will receive the money that’s raised.

“Twenty-five nonprofit agencies submit grant proposals,” says Borgealt. “Students review them all, looking at how an agency will use the money, the impact it will make in the community, and if its mission is consistent with Marquette’s.”

In 2005, 1,400 students and other members of the Marquette community participated in Hunger Clean-Up — raising $20,000 and working at 89 sites across Milwaukee. For many students, Hunger Clean-Up is their first foray into community service at Marquette — and a springboard to other community service work.

Senior Lisa Hensch, 2005 winner of the Pedro Arrupe Award for her commitment to serving the poor, is Hunger Clean-Up’s work site coordinator. “A lot of agencies get so excited, they call to find out when we’re coming back,” she says. “Students look forward to it, too. They want to visit with the people they helped last year.”

Jeff Wenzler, Arts ‘97, remembers his own Hunger Clean-Up experience. “It’s a day that celebrates reaching out to the community,” he says. Now an employee in Marquette’s Office of Alumni Relations, Wenzler organizes a community service project for alumni called National Service Day, which runs the same day as Hunger Clean-Up. On National Service Day, Marquette alumni from around the United States participate in service projects in their own communities. Alumni living close to Marquette can participate in either National Service Day or Hunger Clean-Up.

“These events give alumni the chance to revisit their roots, the time when they became socially aware,” says Wenzler. “When they participate, those feelings are rekindled.”

Marquette’s ‘Lil Sibs Weekend is also the same weekend as Hunger Clean-Up. Siblings
Local service projects
The whole community’s a classroom
By Robin Graham

Each semester, Marquette hosts Service Fair, a two-day gathering in the Alumni Memorial Union of more than 100 social services agencies and student organizations. Its purpose? To match local community service opportunities with first- and second-year students who are eager to help.

Hundreds showed up at this fall’s Service Fair. “Students were in line two hours before it started,” says Kim Jensen, Arts ’98, assistant program administrator, Service Learning Program. “I think that shows how interested and engaged they are in community service.”

The reason for this enthusiasm is something that is pure Marquette: students with strong high school track records in community service come to the university wanting to continue doing it. “In return, we try to make it as easy as possible for them to get involved,” says Dave Borgealt, assistant dean for community programs in Marquette’s Office of Student Development.

At Marquette, there are three major entryways to local service projects: The Office of Student Development’s Center for Community Service, Service Learning Program and University Ministry.

Borgealt works at Marquette’s Center for Community Service, which oversees student organizations that perform community service. The center hosts many one-day events throughout the academic year. Hunger Clean-Up is its largest. (see article, p. 1)

The center also runs CONNECT, a volunteer network that places student volunteers at more than 40 nonprofit agencies throughout Milwaukee.

Other Center for Community Service projects include:
• Urban Connection, pairing new freshmen with student orientation staff members to work on community service projects in Milwaukee
• Give Us 4 Day, a joint project with a local TV station during which students help winterize homes of the elderly and disabled
• Weekend immersions, which allow students to explore social service issues

The Service Learning Program, part of Marquette’s Institute for Urban Life, blends community service and the classroom. Each semester, students can register for any one of around 55 courses that include an optional service learning component — for college credit.

“Students integrate what they learn in the community with the course they’re taking,” says Bobbi Timberlake, program administrator, who started Marquette’s Service Learning Program in 1994.

Community service comprises 15 to 30 percent of course grades. Faculty is responsible for linking the student’s community service experience to what’s being learned in the classroom.

“The connection must make sense to the student,” says Timberlake.

Erik Wright, a senior with a double major in elementary education and Spanish, has taken three Service Learning Program courses. “When you can apply what you learn in the classroom to the real world,” he says, “it gives you a new level of understanding.”

The Service Learning Program also offers a social justice service project, designed to raise awareness around an issue chosen by students. “Our goal is to link the Marquette community with the surrounding community,” says Timberlake. This semester’s issue is decent and affordable housing in Milwaukee.

The Service Learning Program also offers international service experiences. (see sidebar, p. 4.) Projects run by University Ministry make a deliberate connection between volunteering and faith. Midnight Run, a University Ministry service project, has roots in Matthew 25:40: “... whatever you did for one of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

Started by students in 1988, Midnight Run serves the hungry and homeless at 10 sites on an ongoing basis. One of these, Noon Run, takes place six days a week on the edge of campus, where students serve soup and sandwiches.

“I think that shows how interested and engaged they are in community service,” says Jensen. “They are very powerful learning experiences.”

It’s an experience that also involves students more deeply in Marquette’s urban community. Says Jensen: “We see our setting as a blessing.”

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In addition to board members, the Parents Association is fortunate to have a growing team of parent volunteers from across the country. Parent volunteers help to staff college fair and college day in order to answer frequently asked questions about college life for incoming freshmen, host gatherings of parents and more. If you are interested in becoming a board member or parent volunteer, call Kristine Pavlovski, Parents Association coordinator, at (414) 288-1607 or visit the Parents Web site at www.marquette.edu/parents.
Hunger Clean-Up
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are welcome guests and are often seen working along-
side their brothers and sisters.
Suzanne (Breslin) Hilker, Comm ‘03, was introduced to Hunger Clean-Up when she visited big sister Valerie Breslin Montague, Arts ’00. Hilker later participated in the event all four years of her undergraduate career. Now an alumna actively involved in the Minnesota alumni chapter, she participates in National Service Day in the Minneapolis area — while her sister participates in Chicago.

A reflection by Dr. Susan Mountin

The call to service comes from deep within the tradition of Jesuit education. St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, believed in finding God in the thick of things: the city, the marketplace, and among the poor and needy as well as those in decision-making roles. Perhaps that is why service in Marquette’s urban community has been so important. Through serving, we get a glimpse into the world and lives of others. Acts of service might initially help us to feel a sense of calling, but over time these acts can become so important. Through serving, we help to shape them.

It’s a conversation Mountin has had with students many times. She tells them that for her, the best moves she has made weren’t even on her radar screen.

“I’ve backed into every job I’ve had,” says Mountin. “The hand of God has guided me to things I never dreamed of doing.”

That includes Mountin’s job with The Manresa Project.

“I can’t imagine doing any other work,” she says. “It’s brought me tremendous joy.”

For more about The Manresa Project, visit www.marquette.edu/pages/home/manresa/

In addition to being incorporated into disciplines as diverse as English, management and physical therapy, the Manresa Project collaborates with the Office of Student Development on student leader-
ship development and conducts the First-Year Reading Program, ministry internships, a speaker series and retreats.

“We’ve provided lots of entry points for students,” says Mountin. “As they continue to explore, we provide links to other university resources as well.”

Some of these are Marquette alumni, parents and community leaders who speak at monthly events sponsored by The Manresa Project called Destination Dinners. Here, current students can talk with these adults about how their values and choices have helped to shape them.

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■ And much, much more
In January, 2005 I had a unique experience that drew me even more deeply into the Marquette community. I accompanied the Marquette student chapter of Global Medical Relief on a mission trip to Honduras in Central America. I was one of seven nurses and physicians accompanying about 20 Marquette students who were giving up the last week of their winter break for this service trip. One of those students happened to be my son. Honduras is the second-poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. We stayed in Nuevo Paraiso, a small village where battered and abandoned women and their children go to safely get their lives back in order. We spent a lot of time playing with the children. Their mothers extended profound hospitality by preparing our meals and providing us with rustic but lovingly cared-for housing. Each day, we gathered medicines, toothbrushes and other supplies and traveled to poor, remote areas in the Honduran backcountry to set up daylong medical clinics, known as medical brigades. The week we were there we provided over daylong medical clinics, known as medical clinics. We were there for almost anything medical care to more than 2,000 people. Illnesses treated included almost anything typically seen in the U.S. (although often at more serious stages because of delayed care) as well as intestinal parasite infections that are extremely rare in North America.

Community leaders helped with logistics — including setting up makeshift clinics in the local two-room schoolhouse and arranging for continuity of care for people with chronic illnesses. We also worked with them on public health issues such as clean water. Marquette students were impressive, on all levels. They organized the entire trip, from fund raising and interviewing trip candidates, to collecting and packing medical supplies, to transportation and Spanish-language interpreting — everything that was needed for each medical brigade to run effectively. They were hard-working, enthusiastic and respectful of the people they served. It was easy to see why many of them are considering careers in service, primarily health care. I was honored to be on their team.

We were also deeply moved by the people of Honduras. Though extremely poor, they taught us important lessons including hospitality, generosity, perseverance, flexibility and patience. Daily, they reminded us that genuine happiness is based on relationships, not material possessions.

We Are Marquette! I feel this more strongly now than I had this experience with these remarkable students. I urge you to consider encouraging your sons and daughters to go on a Marquette mission trip. University administration works diligently to make safety and security top priorities; there was never a moment when I believed we were in a dangerous situation. Mission trips provide powerful opportunities for leadership and service, and students return to Marquette even more academically motivated. They truly promote the Jesuit tradition of “women and men for others.”

Chuck Garven, M.D., proud dad of Chad Garven, junior, Arts and Sciences
Chuck Garven is a family practice physician. He and his wife, Eileen, live in Cleveland with their two other children, Maura and Kevin.