

COMMUNITY *connection*

Messiah students take the service plunge

Volunteers help meet needs of local community

It is not unusual to find dirt under the fingernails of Messiah College students. Each week, more than 400 Messiah students volunteer to tackle projects such as gardening, tutoring, painting, cleaning, and construction at a variety of nonprofit agencies. For many students, their plunge into service provides an opportunity to combine their knowledge and abilities to help meet various needs in the local community.

Messiah students regularly donate their time and talent to 34 community organizations. Locally, students work with children and teenagers, migrants, paroled prisoners, residents of assisted living facilities, and the homeless. The College believes so deeply in these transformative experiences of community service that a campus office exists primarily to coordinate opportunities for students to put their faith into action.

The Agapé Center for Service and Learning by name alone reflects Messiah's approach to service. Agapé, a Greek word often translated into English simply as "love," is further defined by the Agapé Center's Director Chad Frey as "love for strangers, those in your community or

even neighborhood who have a need." By connecting students with needs in their local community, the Agapé Center works to achieve its mission of "providing holistic learning opportunities for students, and encouraging students toward an ethic of discipleship, service, and civic engagement."

Throughout the year, the Agapé Center coordinates three specific occasions for the Messiah community to engage in community service. The Center calls these opportunities "service plunge days." When the first-year class of students arrives on campus for Welcome Week activities, their orientation to Messiah includes a half-day service experience called Into the Streets. Designed to introduce students to their new community as well as challenge them to volunteer on a regular basis, Into the Streets matches first-year students with a variety of local agencies. It's not unusual, comments Becky Owen, local community service director at the Agapé Center, for a few first-year students to connect with an organization during their Into the Streets experience and serve there again during their time at Messiah.

The second service plunge day is Dr. King Community Engagement Day, a day to "be the hands and feet to Martin Luther King's vision," explains Frey. In collaboration with Messiah's Office of Multicultural Programs and Harrisburg community partners, Messiah students and employees have the opportunity to learn about the life and vision of King by discovering more about the various neighborhoods within the city of Harrisburg and serving at several city agencies.

The College's commitment to service is particularly evident in mid-April when



During Service Day 2007, Messiah College students and staff spent a day painting, building a playground, gardening, constructing a fence, and spreading mulch at the Silence of Mary Home in downtown Harrisburg

classes are canceled and administrative offices are closed so that the entire Messiah College community can participate in service. This third service plunge day, simply referred to as Service Day, is held in conjunction with Special Olympics, which is hosted on campus. While 1,000 Messiah College students and employees assist

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The entire first-year class participates in their first community service experience as Messiah students during Into the Streets

Special Olympics by being “buddies” to the athletes, managing logistics, and serving food, another 1,000 volunteer for projects ranging from clean-up of the Yellow Breeches, to litter pick-up in Grantham, to planting a garden at the Silence of Mary Home in downtown Harrisburg.

These plunge days, along with a series of on-campus theme weeks that create awareness about hunger and homelessness, human rights, and missions, are designed to sensitize students to the deep needs of the local community as well as the world. “We work hard to help our students contextualize their learning experience,” says Frey. “Grantham happens to be where that learning takes place, and we want to help students realize that they’re here for the community, not the other way around.”

Tying classroom instruction to a hands-on, practical service experience is an important component of creating transformative experiences for students. This intentional integration of academics and community

service is called service-learning, and identifying service-learning partnerships is a key element of the Agapé Center’s mission. Service-learning is a two-way street of learning to serve and serving to learn that uses practical experience to deepen students’ understanding of classroom instruction. For example, students studying ecology benefit from applying their knowledge to inventorying wetlands at a local park. “Such opportunities to match theoretical classroom learning with an authentic service activity are a critical part of a student’s discernment process when thinking through vocational calling,” says Frey.

While the Agapé Center provides many opportunities for students to impact the important work of various agencies, it also seeks to instill in students a desire to make service a lifestyle, not just an experience. Service plunge days are certainly important for encouraging campuswide involvement in community service, but it’s really day-to-day commitments—the more than 400 students who volunteer each week—that lie at the heart of the Agapé Center’s mission.

Adopting a lifestyle of service is in keeping not only with the mission of the Agape Center but with the broader mission of the College to “prepare students for lives of leadership, service, and reconciliation in church and society.” Such active engagement in service and learning is deeply embedded in the College’s heritage. “It’s not uncommon,” Owen says, “for students to either stay in the area after graduating from Messiah to continue working with an agency or to commit to short-term service through an organization such as AmeriCorps.”

Messiah students are recognized among

local community agencies as being outstanding volunteers. One community partner writes, “Thank you so much for all the love and energy that we benefit from during the Into the Streets and Service Day projects. The jobs may seem like tasks anyone could do, but you supply the anyones that we don’t have, and they do it with such great love . . .”

The reality of giving, Owen notes, is the reciprocal gift the giver receives—increased understanding and compassion for the needs of the world—and Messiah students, by daring to take the plunge into community service, are truly helping meet the needs of the world both in their backyards and across the ocean.



Messiah educators and students reflect on their service experiences. Read their narratives at www.messiah.edu/community.

COMMUNITY connection

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Community Connection is published by the Messiah College Advancement Division.

PURPOSE STATEMENT: Community Connection exists to help create strong connections between Messiah College and the surrounding community by providing accurate news and information on issues of interest to residents of the Messiah College community.

Any questions or feedback regarding this publication may be directed to Beth L. Lorow, Office of Marketing and Public Relations, Messiah College, Box 3020, Grantham, PA 17027

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Three “Service Plunge Days” intentionally create service opportunities for Messiah students and employees in the local community. Here are a few participation statistics from 2006–2007:

Into the Streets:

759 first-year and transfer students at 38 sites

MLK Community Engagement Day:

61 participants at 5 sites

Service Day:

572 students and 147 employees at Special Olympics

559 students and 161 employees at 41 sites

Alumna spotlight: meet Tonya Brown



Alumna Tonya Brown has lived her entire life within a three-mile radius in Upper Allen Township, a point of pride for this professional whose job requires partnerships with multiple organizations in order to create recreation opportunities for local residents. As director of parks and recreation for the Mechanicsburg School District and three surrounding municipalities (Mechanicsburg and Shiremanstown boroughs and Upper Allen Township), Brown administers a vast assortment of facilities and programs.

While a student at Messiah College in the mid-1980s, Brown began volunteering as a girls' basketball coach in the summer sports camps. Post-graduation, she

remained involved with various recreation programs, and in 1998 she was hired as the full-time director. As overseer of 400 recreational programs a year (including 90 in the summer months alone), an outdoor swimming pool visited by 450 kids a day, a staff of nearly 200 employees and volunteers, 16 parks encompassing 220 acres, and a successful \$1.1 million grant writing campaign, Brown keeps plenty busy. She speaks fondly about the opportunity her job affords her "to produce a smile, or produce a memory" for children of all ages and all backgrounds. She also notes the importance of parks and recreation as public schools nationwide emphasize the value of health and wellness.

Brown's interest in recreation can be traced to her days as a child in Grantham, when tubing on the Yellow Breeches was a favorite activity. Her connection to Messiah spans equally as far. Her mother retired from the College with more than 20 years in dining services. After graduating from Mechanicsburg High School, Brown enrolled at Messiah as a parks and recreation major

and had a spot on the girls' basketball team. Many of her professors left such an indelible impression on her that she regularly recalls what she was taught and applies it to her professional life.

In addition to managing the parks and recreation program for an area that encompasses 23,000 residents, Brown is the junior varsity women's basketball coach for Mechanicsburg High School. During her tenure as varsity girls' basketball coach from 1989 to 2001, the team enjoyed its best season record (25–4) and was the Mid-Penn Keystone Champion in 1999–2000. Brown also serves as a trustee at Shepherdstown United Methodist Church and is on the board of directors for the Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society.

Planning and coordinating recreational activities for the community doesn't deter Brown's enthusiasm for recreating with her own family. Along with Dirk, her husband of 20 years, sixteen-year-old Josh and eleven-year-old Hannah, the family still makes time for their favorite activities—skiing, hiking, biking, and kayaking.

Dave Tanis: adventures in education

by Kay Ben-Avraham '08

Paddling down the Susquehanna River in their canoes, 14 students, one fun-loving instructor, and a small boy are enjoying themselves immensely. "It was easier taking him on the canoeing portion of the trip," Dave Tanis recalls of his then-five-year-old son Benjamin. "We did backpacking, then canoeing, then backpacking. The backpacking might have been tough on him, so he just came along for the canoeing part. If he got bored, we could pull over and find some rocks for him to throw in."

Many parents would opt for less risky trips on which to take their young sons. Not so for Tanis and his family. Their taste for adventure reveals itself in Tanis' choice of vocation: director of adventure programs at Messiah College. Tanis hails from California. He and his wife, Tricia, became a part of the college community in 1995, and they now live in Dillsburg with their children: 7-year-

old Benjamin, 3-year-old Hannah, and Peter, who will be 1 in August.

Tanis' responsibilities as director of adventure programs include teaching courses within the College's adventure education major as well as establishing the policies and procedures of all campus adventure activities. At Messiah, that means his job entails activities such as Canoe-a-thon, an annual event in which students canoe down the Yellow Breeches to raise money for summer missions; clean-up of the Yellow Breeches during Service Day; and the activities of the Outdoors Club. "I love it," he says eagerly. "It's a great job."

When he first arrived at Messiah after involvement in the Coalition for Christian Outreach (CCO) in Ohio, Tanis was the director of Issachar's Loft, an on-campus organization that works with groups of students to foster teamwork and communal



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identity through canoeing, rock climbing, caving, and other outdoor “adventure” trips. As director of adventure programming, Tanis still leads many such trips, some of which are actual college courses, like three-week intensive wilderness immersion courses in locations such as Hawaii and Texas.

Tanis enthusiastically explains the passion he has for his work. “It’s really something about the holistic nature of the wilderness,” he says. “You’re immersed in each others’ lives, without the distractions that we normally use to isolate ourselves from each other.” There are no cell phones or computers; students live, eat, sleep, and interact with only one another for the entire journey. In his experience as a trip leader, Tanis has seen significant growth and learning take place among—and within—students who take the leap and divorce themselves from modern conveniences. He describes the experience as “a powerful medium” in their lives.

As an instructor, witnessing this “powerful medium” at work is what he loves best about his job. As much as he loves the outdoors, it is the people with whom he travels that lend spice to his line of work. Of his many journeys, the ones that stand out are those on which he took unique groups whose interactions evolved into something rich and surprising.

Some of them, like the Susquehanna River canoeing trip, involve family members. One trip, which Tanis co-led with his wife and another staff member, took a hand-picked group of students to the canyons of southern Utah. The trip shines in his memory, again mostly because of its participants. “Their paths would never have intersected otherwise,” Tanis says, “and it’s really the combination of students that make a trip stand out to me.”

Sometimes the nature of his work is misunderstood, and Tanis likes to distinguish between outdoor *recreation* and adventure *education*: amusement versus learning. “There’s a place for both,” he says, “but with adventure education, you really focus on the inter- and intrapersonal dynamics of a group: building them, seeing what comes out of them. That’s what defines an adventure education experience; the wilderness is just the backdrop.”

Against that backdrop, Tanis continues to infuse new generations of students with a love of the outdoors, a respect for it—and for one another. His passion for adventure and team-building has followed him from coast to coast and continues to propel his efforts wherever he goes. As he sees it, all the spectacular “backdrops” that he encounters are really only a means to that end: learning to become part of a team.



To see photographs taken by Dan Custer '09 while on adventure education trips, visit www.messiah.edu/community

Book examines Amish commitment to forgiveness

Public curiosity about Amish culture, heritage, and faith peaked last October after a gunman stormed the one-room Nickel Mines schoolhouse in rural Lancaster County. Word of the tragic event spread quickly—five Amish girls seriously injured and six lives lost, including the gunman and five schoolgirls. While this violent act against a peaceful people stunned the world, many observers seemed equally mystified by the quick extension of forgiveness offered by the Amish community to the family of the gunman.

Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy, a book exploring the religious beliefs and habits that led the Amish to forgive so quickly, was conceived by authors David Weaver-Zercher, Donald Kraybill, and Steven Nolt. Each author, including Weaver-Zercher, chair of the department of biblical and religious studies at Messiah College, had been contacted extensively by media in the days and weeks following the tragedy at Nickel Mines. They agreed that the cultural complexity of the Amish warranted more than soundbites on the evening news or a few short sentences in the morning newspaper, and they embarked on writing *Amish Grace* together.

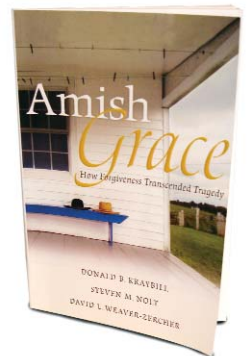
Though the extent of violence in the Nickel Mines community was uncommon, the Amish response was not, according to Weaver-Zercher. In the opening chapter of *Amish Grace*, the authors write, “The Nickel Mines Amish certainly didn’t anticipate the horror of October 2. They were, however, uncommonly prepared to respond to it with graciousness, forbearance, and love.” The following chapters trace their response to the tragedy but also explore the habit, roots, spirituality, and practice of forgiveness among the Amish—a practice they have demonstrated time and again in surprising ways in their history.

“The story of Amish forgiveness eclipsed the story of schoolhouse slaughter,” the authors write about the swell of op-ed pieces and countless commentators trying to dissect this seemingly peculiar action. While the world attempted to absorb this act of forgiveness, the family of the gunman spoke publicly about the impact of the grace extended to them by their Amish neighbors: “Your compassion has reached beyond our family, beyond our community, and is changing our world, and for this we sincerely thank you.”

Amish Grace will be available nationally in bookstores on September 21. All of the author royalties from the book will be donated to the Mennonite Central Committee to benefit their children’s ministries around the world.



Read David Weaver-Zercher’s October 8, 2006 op-ed, “The Amish Are Not Ours,” as published by the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* at www.messiah.edu/community.



David Weaver-Zercher will present a public lecture, “Amish Grace: Reflections on the Nickel Mines School Shooting One Year Later,” on September 26 at 7:30 p.m. in Hostetter Chapel. Messiah College alumnus and professor, Weaver-Zercher '83 is the author or editor of six books, including *The Amish in the American Imagination* (2005). He began studying Amish culture in graduate school. “The Amish are extraordinary in many ways, and I became particularly interested in how outsiders talked about them,” he recounts. Weaver-Zercher, who has been teaching at the College for 10 years, lives in Mechanicsburg with his wife, Valerie, and three sons, Sam, Isaiah, and Henry. Prior to teaching at Messiah, Weaver-Zercher was an associate pastor at Grantham Brethren in Christ Church.

FALL 2007 / WINTER 2008
COMMUNITY *connection*

Neighbor to Neighbor



As daylight wanes and cooler weather arrives, I am reminded of how exciting and dynamic the fall season is on Messiah's campus. Welcoming more than 800

new students and their families to our community, enjoying championship quality soccer and field hockey, attending cultural events, and reconnecting with alumni and friends during Homecoming Weekend are among my favorite activities for this time of the year. I hope you will join us this fall season for an athletic event, concert, play, art exhibit, film, or relaxing walk along the Yellow Breeches.

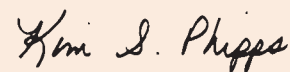
Just as we encourage our neighbors to participate in the life of our campus community, we also encourage our students to participate in the life of the local community. Did you know that more than 400 Messiah students volunteer each week at area community agencies? I am very appreciative of the selfless way many of our students give of their time and talents to serve others. In this issue of *Community Connection*, I invite you to learn about how our Agapé Center for Service and Learning facilitates Messiah's students' service to the community and church.

In this issue, I'm also pleased to introduce you to alumna Tonya Brown and educator Dave Tanis. Both Tonya and Dave value the many outdoor recreational opportunities in central Pennsylvania, and

I think you'll find their professional work noteworthy and intriguing.

Messiah College truly desires to be a community resource. By including a community calendar and sampling of programs, facilities, and resources available to our neighbors, we hope you will find plenty of reasons to come to campus! (Keep in mind that you can always stay informed of the latest news of particular interest to our neighbors at www.messiah.edu/community.)

Warm regards,



Kim S. Phipps
President

Community calendar

August 2007

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

First-year students arrive 30

September 2007

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
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9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

First day of class 4

Family Weekend 30

Family Weekend 28-29

October 2007

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

Fall Recess 14

Fall Recess 11-13

Homecoming 20

November 2007

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

Thanksgiving Recess 25

Thanksgiving Recess 21-24

December 2007

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Messiah College Christmas Concert 2

"A Messiah College Christmas" Dinner 1

Last Day of Classes 14

Final Exams 17-20

January 2008

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

J-Term begins 9

J-Term Ends 30

February 2008

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
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16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

Spring semester begins 4

March 2008

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
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16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Spring Recess 8

Spring Recess 9-15

Easter Recess 21-22

Easter Recess 23-24

To view the full Messiah College calendar of events on the web, please visit www.messiah.edu, and click "View the Full Events Calendar" link on the right-hand side under "Upcoming Events."

Messiah College as a community resource

Messiah College offers a variety of programs, facilities, and resources to local residents throughout the year. Here is just a sampling of what Messiah College has available:

Cultural Series

The Messiah College Cultural Series has a distinguished tradition of bringing world-class performers to Central Pennsylvania. We are pleased to bring our patrons an eclectic, quality repertoire of internationally renowned performing artists in the coming year — a Celtic storm, traditional (and not-so-traditional!) jazz, solo guitar, and a holiday brass concert. To reserve your ticket or season subscription, call (717) 691-6036 or visit www.messiah.edu/culturalseries.

Championship Soccer

Championships in the men's and women's soccer programs have established Messiah College as one of the elite Division III

programs in the country. Messiah is well-known nationally not only for winning, but also for consistently adhering to the highest standards of fine play and sportsmanship. For a 2007 schedule for all of Messiah's athletic teams, visit www.messiah.edu/athletics.

WVMM 90.7

Tune into 90.7 WVMM, Messiah College's student-operated radio station. The "V" is on the air seven days a week featuring a variety of eclectic music from 7 a.m. until midnight. Programming features specialty shows of bluegrass, worship, old-time swing, and the BBC news. Summer program hours may vary. Visit www.messiah.edu/wvmm for the complete schedule.

New website tracks College construction projects

Neighbors interested in the renovations at Messiah's athletic fields or the construction of a new president's residence will find the College's new construction website — www.messiah.edu/construction_projects — both informative and interesting. The site provides construction and renovation timelines, project updates, and photos.