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College students give back on spring break

Alternative vacations allow 3 to reach out where help is needed

Ben Rubin
The Journal News

Thanks in no small part to MTV, spring break has come to represent the traditional Dionysian college delights of parties, road trips and tello-O shots.

And, while some college students gladly partook in that annual ritual this March, others spent the week traveling around the world doing something quite opposite from the spring break model: giving back.

Three local students chose to take part in alternative spring break programs, heading to Mississippi, Israel and Tanzania, in hopes of doing their small part to help others.

For the second straight year, John Purpura, 23, of Dominican College went to the Gulf Coast to help refurbish homes destroyed in

Hurricane Katrina.

Last year, he gutted and demolished residences. This year, the Staten Island resident came to Long Beach, Miss., and spent his days installing doors and moulding, building floors and painting.

Residents openly greeted the group of about 20 Dominican College students and staff by waving to them or honking their horns. "They don't care where you're from, but they know what you're doing," Purpura said.

Manhattanville College student Kimberly Fiedler-Zinaman, 22, first visited Israel two years ago, fell in love with the country and has tried to go back as often as possible. For her most recent trip there, she said she wanted to give back to a country that had become something of a second home to her.

"I think it's really nice to go somewhere and see how you can help them in a more intimate way, rather than being a tourist or going on vacation," said Fiedler-Zinaman, a Katonah resident and the college's Jewish Student Association



Seth Harrison/The Journal News

Kimberly Fiedler-Zinaman of Katonah, a Manhattanville College student, joined 200 students in assisting with beautification and outreach projects around the Negev Desert in Israel.

president.

She joined about 200 students through the Jewish National Fund, an environmentalist nonprofit, to assist in beautification and outreach projects.

Every day, Fiedler-Zinaman went

to work on a different project around the Negev Desert. One day, she painted and cleaned a school park. On another day, she helped serve cake and tea at a home for people disabled by war wounds or medical conditions.



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"It's almost selfish, because I feel really good about the work I'm doing," she said.

Of course, not all volunteer work has to revolve around swinging a hammer.

For an alternative to the alternative spring break, a group of 15 MBA students from Pace University went on the school's first international field study to Tanzania.

"The focus was social entrepreneurship, how to use entrepreneurship to alleviate poverty in some of the poorest countries in the world," said Professor Bruce Bachenheimer, who led the trip.

On the trip, Melissa Lopez, White Plain's economic development coordinator, met with local political and business leaders, including Jackie Robinson's son, David Robinson, who was building up a coffee growers co-op.

Her group also visited several Tanzania Social Action Fund project sites, including a location where men and women with HIV/AIDS earned a living by raising and selling chickens.

Lopez, 25, and the group returned to the United States, charged with developing market plans to grow the Tanzanian businesses they saw. Some students plan to return about a year later to implement those plans, Bachenheimer said.

"I think that for us to come back home and put our brains together... and give that to another country, it's priceless," Lopez said.

Lopez and her group partner, A'lynn Bennett, are working on a project to start a cultural and musical exchange with American and Tanzanian students. They also want to host a concert there as a fundraiser to send local youths to college.

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