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UMMers "Pay It Forward" during annual spring break tour

Summary: Twenty-three UMM students traveled throughout the nation serving communities and people during Spring Break 2007.

(April 4, 2007)-The University of Minnesota, Morris' Students Today Leaders Forever (STLF) student organization participated in the 2007 Pay It Forward Tour during Spring Break. The theme of the service trip was "007 Mission [im] Possible"—reflecting their belief that anything is possible and everyone can make a difference. In six different cities across the nation, 23 UMM students conducted service projects that exposed them to different communities, various organizations, and many issues faced by people and their communities.

"I thought it would be fun to travel during Spring Break," says David Nieves '10, El Paso, Texas, "but as I learned more about the trip and the service projects, I started looking forward to serving different communities." The most rewarding part of the trip to Nieves was "knowing that we actually made a difference. Knowing that the difference, regardless of size, was appreciated by those affected."

In Champaign, Illinois, the students worked at Lincoln Square Village, Urbana, assisting with the Seventh Annual Read Across America Day. They read with children, made balloon creations, played games, and created crafts.

During their time in Lansing, Michigan, UMMers worked with the Giving Tree Farm, a nonprofit organization that works with the mentally and physically disabled ensuring that they receive nutritious food. They worked on a farm that grows organic food for this cause.

On the third day, students organized and filled donation request orders for the Daily Bread Food Bank in Toronto, Canada. In Syracuse, New York, they volunteered at a daycare at the oldest Salvation Army in the United States.

One of the group's favorite projects took place in Baltimore, Maryland, where they worked with AmeriCorps and National Student Partnerships (NSP), a college student-lead, nonprofit organization that helps people in need "get back on their feet." The students helped locate companies to sponsor the group and helped find possible clients.

While in Washington, D.C., the group teamed up with seven other busloads of college students from Midwest schools. They worked with the Earth Conservation Corps to clean out a stream connecting to the Anacostia River, one of the dirtiest rivers in the United States. "It was pretty amazing," says Megan Carlson '08, New Hope. "As a group we pulled more than 150 tires and tons of garbage from the river in just three hours."

As a core leader, as a three-year veteran of Pay It Forward tours, and as one of the founders of the UMM organization, Carlson enjoyed seeing UMM students grow throughout the week. She shares Nieves' sense of fulfillment, noting: "This annual trip has become one of my passions in life, not because it consumes my life, but because I am able to make a difference and leave an impact on Morris and communities across the country."

Service trips have greatly enhance Carlson's UMM education: "These trips have really helped me grow as a person and a leader on campus. Each time I am able to learn more about myself as well as learn more about the world around me. Our experiences serving other communities are priceless and have driven me to want to do more."

"I would strongly recommend students participate in this trip," says Nieves, "if you enjoy helping and working with others, meeting new people, traveling, and paying it forward!"

This year, 15 Pay It Forward Tours with 600 participants, including the UMM students, served nearly 9,000 hours in 77 different communities.

UMM students who participated in the 2007 Pay It Forward service trip are:

Tiffany Allison '09, Maple Plain Olivia Awoudi '10, Minneapolis Alyssa Bonner '09, Hopkins, Jenny Brown '07, Wells, Megan Carlson '08, New Hope, Irene Fernando '07, Carson, California, Ashley Harris '10, Ely, Kelly Herzberg '10, Paynesville, Dan Kennedy '08, Cottage Grove, June (JiYoon) Kim '10, Seoul, Republic of Korea, Sara Lahr '10, Sauk Centre, Brandon Lehner '08, Brooklyn Park, Arline Litchfield '10, Norwell, Massachusetts, Nick Maciej '08, Swanville, David Nieves '10, El Paso, Texas, Kelly Nygaard '08, Faribault, Jenessa Petersen '10, Shorewood, Erica Riestenberg '10, Perham, Nikki Schutte '08, Longview, Texas, Michelle Scribner '10, Stacy, Kim Simek '07, St. Paul, Laura Woltjer '09, Little Falls, Qiaj Vang '10, St. Paul.

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