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The Intergenerational Face(s) of Service Learning

Summary:

(November 17, 2003)-From the first class, students in Professor Andrew Hostetler's "Adulthood and Aging" psychology course have confronted stereotypes about older adults head on, or at least face-to-face. In addition to lectures, discussions, and readings, students in the class at the University of Minnesota, Morris were required to pair with a senior citizen from the Morris area to plan and implement a community project promoting intergenerational cooperation and friendship. These student-senior partnerships constitute the core of the service learning project, "Bridging the Gap: Building Intergenerational Community for Healthy Aging." The project has thus far been a rousing success, spawning what will hopefully become an annual event.

After pairing with senior volunteers from the community, students first spent some time getting to know their partners and interviewing them about their life experiences. Among many other topics, these interviews explored the seniors' past and present experiences with community involvement. Student-senior pairs also discussed ways in which the lives of area seniors, and relationships between generations, could be enriched.

Students and senior volunteers came together on October 1 in three separate small group meetings (at the Morris Senior Center, Grand View Apartments and West Wind Village) to decide on a community project that could be completed by the end of fall semester at UMM. From the many ideas discussed, the majority of participants agreed that, given time limitations, it made the most sense to assist in the planning and organization of two events that were already scheduled: The annual Senior Center Christmas Bazaar on December 6 and an "Old Time" Dance to be sponsored by Prairie Renaissance Cultural Alliance on December 5 at the Morris Area Elementary School.

At a second meeting held October 27 at the UMM Student Center, students and senior volunteers (with the guidance of Hostetler, and Argie Manolis and Carol McCannon, coordinator of UMM's Service Learning Program and of Community Service and Volunteerism in the Office of Student Activities, respectively) created and distributed among the groups a list of tasks and responsibilities in order to link the events together under a common theme. The title of the two-day event is, "Morris Winter Fest: Generating Connections, Connecting Generations."

In conjunction with the Bazaar, students and seniors will work together on food and arts and crafts contributions, item pricing, grab-bag assembly, and decorations. Several students will also serve as "hosts" and "hostesses" during the event. Some students have already taken advantage of the opportunity to learn the art of lefse-making, which was prepared in advance of the Bazaar on November 12-13. In conjunction with the dance, project participants will organize a community potluck dinner and additional games and activities, and they will put together an "historical scrapbook," an exhibit of photos from past social events in Morris and other historical materials to be displayed at the dance. Finally, student and seniors will publicize the events to a diverse array of community groups and organizations, and will organize transportation for those who need it. Below is a full listing of events:

Morris Winter Fest:

Generating Connections, Connecting Generations

Friday, December 5

4:00 p.m. FREE Dance workshop at MAES (gymnasium)

6:00 p.m. Community Potluck at MAES (cafeteria)

7:30 p.m. Old Time Dance

Featuring Live Music by the Tickwoods
and Dance Caller Jeanne O'Neil

Sponsored in conjunction with PRCA

\$5 general admission

\$3 for students and seniors

Children under 12 Free!

Saturday, December 6

9:00 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Christmas Bazaar

Morris Senior Center

For transportation to these events or for more information, call 589-6272.

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