

USD students spend Martin Luther King Jr., Day in service to others

By Travis Gulbrandson
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Although no classes were held Monday, many students from the University of South Dakota were still hard at work.

That's because they were taking part in the annual Martin Luther King, Jr., Day of Service, which finds groups of students performing various projects for groups and individuals in the community.

The event is hosted by the USD Center for Academic Engagement.

"Students across campus have the opportunity to take part in a variety of service projects that we have planned with partners across the Vermillion community," said Whitney Siegfried, coordinator for academic engagement. "They range anywhere from the food pantry to the Welcome Table to the recycling center."

Beginning at 1 p.m., approximately 120 student volunteers set out to perform about 20 projects on campus and around the community.

"We have an MLK student board that helps with the planning and implementation of MLK Day, and we have a board president that connects with the community partners that we work with on a regular basis ... and see if they have any projects they need any help with, and go from there," Siegfried said.

Marketing major Trent Carlson was among the group who went to Vermillion's Center for Children and Families, where

they performed landscaping work, painted walls and built shelves, among other tasks.

"We're almost done with all the projects they gave us, so they're finding more stuff for us to do," Carlson said.

Another group of students went to the First United Methodist Church to prepare food for the Welcome Table, which provides a free meal to members of the community.

"We went to Hy-Vee and got groceries. We're making grilled cheese, tomato soup, green beans, pineapple, salad and cookies for dessert," first-year biology graduate student Tyler Miller said Monday afternoon. "We're making the meal now and it'll be served at 5:30 to 7."

Most of the students arrived back at the Muenster University Center ballroom – the central location for USD's MLK events – between 4:30 and 5 p.m., after which time they had a "hunger banquet."

"It's really just a way for people to experience the inequalities – the poverty, illiteracy or food justice in general," Siegfried explained. "It's a way to highlight these issues and give the students a very powerful experience, and (an opportunity to) learn more about what it might be like to live in a low-income community or third-world country and see how poverty really affects them."

The students also were required to bring a non-perishable food item to donate to the Vermillion Food Pantry.

They said they were

affected by the experience of "serving," and that they were glad they could devote their Monday to it.

"I think it's very important for students to take a day on, not a day off from school," Miller said. "I know Martin Luther King, Jr., said that life's most persistent, urgent question is, 'What are we doing for others?' So, I think it's important to become involved in the community. There is more of a need in Vermillion than most people realize."

USD senior Sarah Maxe agreed, saying, "I like it a lot. It means a lot to me, because I haven't done this before. So I'm really excited to be able to participate (and) give something back instead of just laying in bed all day."

"The students genuinely want to help," Siegfried said. "They care about the community, and the people in the community. ... Martin

Luther King was a real visionary in our nation's history, and we're really interested in honoring his legacy through service. So I think we just have a lot of civically-engaged students who genuinely care and want to help."

The Day of Service strengthens the link between the USD campus and the community, she added.

"There's a connection between the campus and the community. The campus is a large part of the community, and the community is a large part of campus," Siegfried said.

"We're one big family. I think there are a lot of needs that they need taken care of, or projects that they don't have the manpower to get done on their own, so if we can be there to help them out and make it all happen on one day, it's a win-win for all of us."



First-year biology grad student Tyler Miller opens a large can of green beans in the kitchen at Vermillion's First United Methodist Church. The beans were served as part of the Welcome Table meal, which is provided for free to community members.

(Photo by Travis Gulbrandson)

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Vermillion School District

Spring 2012 Parent/Teacher Conferences

Monday, Feb. 6
2:30-8 p.m.

There will be an early dismissal for the students on Monday, Feb. 6th as follows:
Austin and Jolley Elementary - 1:50 p.m.
Middle and High School - 2 p.m.

Wednesday, Feb. 8

1-6 p.m.

There will be no school on Wednesday, Feb. 8th.
Teacher In-Service will be held from 8 a.m.-noon and conferences will begin at 1 p.m. after In-Service.

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#Y2067: 2010 Dodge Charger SXT, red, 40,396 miles.....	\$15,995
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