Corban students proud to give back on MLK Day

By Saerom Yoo

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Corban University students lobbied to get Martin Luther King Jr. Day off.

The student government petitioned the university last year not because they wanted a long weekend to relax and socialize, but to serve the community.

The university granted the request, and the students held up their end of the bargain Monday on their first MLK Day off from classes.

About 250 Corban students, staffers and faculty joined HandsOn Mid-Willamette Valley's MLK Day of Service to work on various community projects around the Salem area.

Lily Fairman, a Corban junior, started her day at the Historic Deepwood Estate, shoveling mulch for the flower beds.

She said the service day was special because of the way it began.

"I know everybody's excited to be able to serve." she said.

About 20 students spent their day at the estate, cleaning the interior of the Deepwood house, polishing silver and doing yard work in the chilly elements.

The group got a tour of the house before it got to work.

"All this youthful energy is nice," said volunteer gardener Georgia Watson, 75.

Watson, who owns a nursery in Brooks called Georgia's Bloomers, has been a volunteer at Deepwood for two decades.
Corban junior Amelia Kaspari said she chose to work at Deepwood out of curiosity. She wondered what the historic house looked like inside, she said.

"I've driven by here before and always thought it was beautiful," she said.

Lois Cole, executive director of Deepwood, said accomplishing what the volunteers did Monday was a rare opportunity.

"To clean a three-story house and everything inside would be impossible," she said.

Across town, another group of 20 Corban students helped build homes for Habitat for Humanity of the Mid-Willamette Valley on Samaritan Lane SE.

Three homes are in progress at the cul-de-sac with an April 1 deadline approaching.

Michelle Wohr, a Corban junior, kept busy sweeping, hammering and caulking at one of the builds.

"It's actually going by really fast," she said. "I haven't fallen off the ladder yet."

Wohr said she's considering returning to Habitat for more volunteer opportunities.

Melissa Gibler, who organizes the service days for HandsOn, said Corban students, faculty and staffers ended up dominating Monday's event. About 300 total volunteers participated in 33 projects, she said.

Volunteers also read with Boys & Girls Club members, sorted books for Reading for All and made alphabet books for Head Start classes.

MLK Day of Service is one of nine national service days HandsOn organizes.

Lori Schilling, a Corban University director, said students are required to serve a certain number of volunteer hours to graduate.

"That's part of who we are," said Schilling, who oversees the service mandate. "This is expanding our commitment to service and the community."

Schilling said the university also sends first-year and transfer students out for community service at the end of August.

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