

Keeping legacy alive



Photos by STEVEN LANE/The Columbian

Volunteers Allison Jensen, from left, Meredith Morse and Autumn Plumlee, 10, make cards for the homeless during the Martin Luther King Jr. day of service event at United Way's downtown Vancouver office Monday.

Service events in Clark County draw hundreds of volunteers

By **MARISSA HARSHMAN**
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Columbian staff writers

Keeping the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. in mind, 13-year-old Zoe Brown said if she could change one thing about the world, people would treat each other better.

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- King's peace legacy praised after Arizona shootings.
- Hundreds protest cuts in Olympia on King's holiday.

Zoe was doing her own small part on Monday to help make that dream come true. She folded a piece of construction paper into a card and covered the front with motivational phrases.

Always believe in yourself. Never give up. Have faith. Feel invincible.

"I would stop all the bullying," the Covington Middle School student said. "It's not right."



Volunteer Deborah Stein writes a Martin Luther King Jr. quote on the card she made to accompany a gift in a handmade cloth bag.

She used colorful felt pens to write a Martin Luther King Jr. quote inside the card.

"Faith is taking the first step, even when you don't see the whole staircase."

Zoe's card was placed in a handmade cloth bag filled with socks for homeless men, women and children in Clark County.

Zoe and nearly two dozen kids and adult volunteers came together Monday afternoon to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day as part of United Way's annual weekend of service. The group gathered in the United Way office in downtown Vancouver.

The children are all on a waiting list for Big Brothers Big Sisters. They've been accepted into the program that pairs children with adults and are waiting for a match, said Janine Cunningham, United Way community relations associate.

Some of the adult volunteers are AmeriCorps members, some are students at Portland State University and others just heard about the

MORE MLK JR. EVENTS ON WEDNESDAY

■ **11 a.m.:** The Martin Luther King Jr. celebration at Clark College begins with a documentary film about a community of Vietnamese immigrants in New Orleans, in the Penguin Student Lounge.

■ **Afternoon:** Volunteers will help at the Clark County Habitat ReStore, 5000 E. Fourth Plain Blvd., which sells used building materials to raise money for Habitat for Humanity.

■ **5:30 p.m.:** A reception at Clark will be followed by a lecture by S. Renee Mitchell and a concert by the Community A.M.E. Zion Church choir.

All events are free and open to the public. Information is at <http://www.clark.edu/special/mlk>.

King:

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opportunity and signed up.

In addition to preparing packages for the homeless, Cunningham said the event gave volunteers a chance to be a "Big" for a day, experiencing what it would be like to participate in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. At the same time, the children were able to see what having a Big would be like.

"We're trying to show them being a friend to a child is fun," Cunningham said. "It's a way to carry on the Martin Luther King vision for a year, two years, three years."

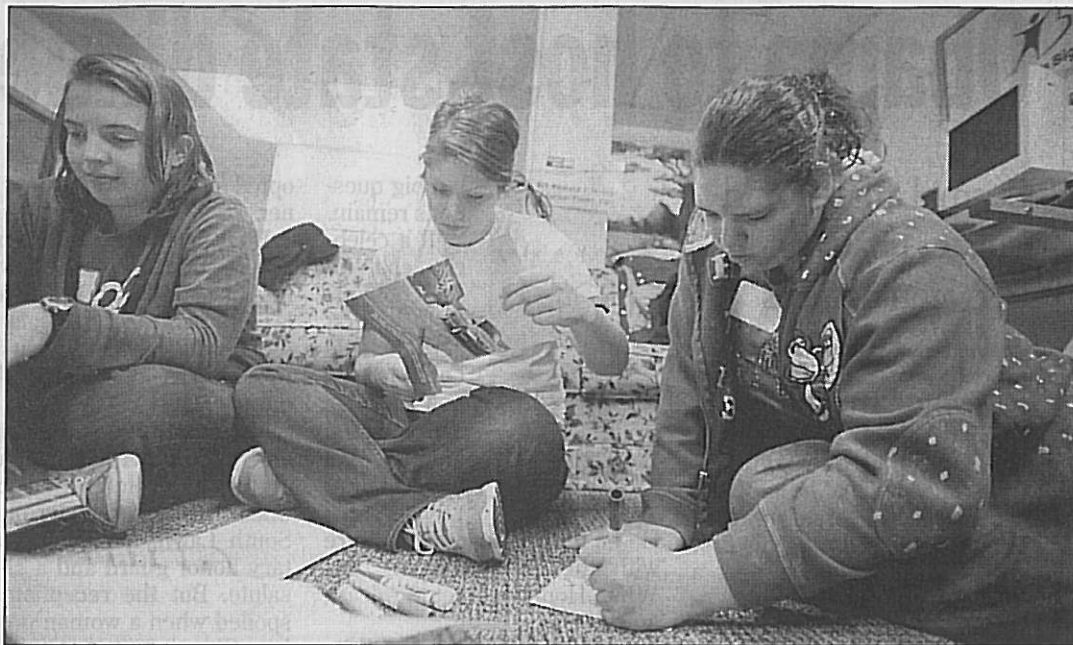
Portland residents Kaitlynn Jaeger and Annie Burnette are AmeriCorps members and part of a Portland project called Playworks, where volunteers bring organized play into low-income schools. Monday was a national day of service for all AmeriCorps members, so the pair attended the Vancouver United Way event.

"I hope that we all remember how important service is," Jaeger said. "If we want our communities to be strong, we have to support them."

"It's really not hard. Take four hours and do something good," Burnette added. "If everybody did that, we'd be in a great place."

Finding ways to serve

Hundreds of other people had the same idea as they participated in numerous service projects across Clark County on Monday. Some took on big-picture activities, like replanting sprawling greenspaces with native trees.



STEVEN LANE/The Columbian

Volunteers Annie Burnette, from left, Kaitlynn Jaeger and Zoe Brown, 13, make cards for the homeless during United Way's Martin Luther King Jr. day of service event Monday.

Other volunteers were up close and personal — health care professionals from the Kaiser Permanente system treated patients at the Free Clinic of Southwest Washington, for instance.

Five physicians handled urgent care patients in the morning. In another part of the building, "We have five optometrists seeing patients," the clinic's executive director, Barbe West, said. "That's something we wouldn't have been able to do."

Later in the day, the clinic was offering more assistance that isn't usually available.

"We have five doctors who will see people on an appointment basis for follow-up care," West said. "Usually, we don't take appointments, but today we can do some follow-up care."

Kaiser Permanente's contribution to low-income patients didn't end when the clinic

doors closed Monday. The organization gave the Free Clinic a check for \$7,500 to help fund its urgent care clinics.

Helping the hungry

At a former bowling center, volunteers were helping sort and organize food and other donated items for Share, a non-profit that serves the county's homeless and hungry.

The Greater Vancouver Interfaith Association mustered about 24 volunteers for the project at the old Timber Lanes building at 2306 N.E. Andresen Road, including a dozen from Kol Ami, a Jewish congregation based in east Vancouver.

"It's a tenet of the faith to do good works," Joni Berinstein said, taking a break from sorting donated food.

Some of the food was going into take-home bags that are is-

sued each Thursday to students from low-income families.

"We partner with 48 schools. We distribute 900 bags a week, each with enough food for a family for a weekend," said Diane McWithey, Share's executive director. Community events like the Day of Service are a big part of Share, she said. "We got 63,000 hours of volunteer labor in 2010."

Share was just one of the agencies benefitting from Interfaith volunteers, said Deawn Herrmann, who helped schedule the organization's Day of Service teams. About 150 other volunteers participated in activities that included quilting, rehabbing a house, working with elderly dementia patients and helping a preschool.

At Washington State University Vancouver, the schedule included workshops and activities that focus on social justice

issues and promote service in the community.

Common ground

Tree-planting was a popular, er, a popular activity. At Fairgrounds Community Park, just north of Northwest 164th Street, about 20 students from Vancouver's Skyview High School and the Center for Agriculture, Science, and Environmental Education planted native plants such as cedars, Douglas firs, Oregon grape and snowberries. It was part of Clark County Environmental Services' plan to plant 5,200 trees on a 10-acre site during January.

And almost 400 volunteers — half of them were students — responded to a restoration project at the Burnt Bridge Creek greenspace. The project was based at Fort Vancouver High School, which partnered with Vancouver Watersheds Council, Americans Building Community and the One of a Kind Drumline.

The event included a speech by Vancouver Mayor Tim Leavitt. And once the service project got rolling, the participants planted about 6,000 trees, said Emily Hirschman, with the Vancouver Watersheds Council.

Participants also did some community building, said Edward Esparza, site director of the GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programming) program at Fort Vancouver High School.

"A lot of conversations were happening," Esparza said. "When you get to know the people working next to you, you find common ground."

Particularly when you've all been up to your wrists in it.