

Honors society will help beautify fort

By **HOWARD BUCK**
Columbian staff writer

This time, the books can wait.

About a hundred top-flight students will dirty their hands when they converge on Clark College this weekend.

The regional conference of the national honors society for two-year colleges, Phi Theta Kappa, will take on an earthy luster when it convenes in Vancouver on Friday through Sunday.

The smart guests will mingle and pass out awards. They'll elect new officers, debate organizational changes and tend to business affairs.

But they'll also roll up sleeves Saturday morning to help make historic Fort Vancouver a little better place.

Students will help spruce up the gardens, chop and stack wood, and tackle other chores. It's evi-

dence they're well-rounded and community service-minded, a cornerstone of the society's ideals.

"Phi Theta Kappa is founded on four hallmarks: scholarship, fellowship, leadership and service," said Deena Bisig, Clark College communications professor and campus adviser for the honors chapter.



Deena Bisig
Clark College
professor

Twenty to 30 active chapter members (out of Clark's 250-300 society members) are big on service, Bisig said.

In recent months they gave 171 Thanksgiving food baskets to fellow students, chipped salmon to enhance Washougal River nutrients and helped the Junior Achievement program, she said.

Taking time out to help the Vancouver community seemed natural, even if it's a regional confer-

Did you know?

■ Founded in 1918, Phi Theta Kappa was modeled after the senior college honorary society, Phi Beta Kappa. It's the largest honors group in U.S. higher education, with about 2 million members. An estimated 200,000 students participate in programs each year.

■ The typical new Phi Theta Kappa member is a full-time student, age 29, with a grade point average of 3.8 (each must sustain a 3.25 GPA over time). In 2004, the top three fields of study were nursing, education and business.

Society:

From Page C1

ence, Bisig said.

"If we were going to host it, we wanted to get (nearly) 200 hours of service done," she said. "If we have 100 people on campus and the fort's so near, that would be cool."

The honors students hail from community and technical colleges in Washington, Alaska, Idaho, Montana and western Canada.

It's the first time Clark has hosted the Phi Theta Kappa event, and it owes to Bisig's work.

Bisig, who turns 30 today, was among 24 Phi Theta Kappa leaders selected nationwide in 2007 as a faculty scholar for the group's annual institute, where top students hone leadership skills.

She won the prestigious Gen. George C. Marshall Public Leadership Award in 2007, and has earned several other local honors.

The students' help is timely, said the fort's top ranger.

"It's great. This is extraor-

dinary, all these individuals coming," said Tracy Fortmann, Fort Vancouver National Historic Site supervisor.

Students will help split and haul firewood used in the bakehouse, kitchen and blacksmith shop. They'll also focus on historic garden beds at the entrance to the reconstructed fort, as well as the portion of the Columbia River waterfront the fort oversees.

"The public loves to spend time in the garden, either on the way in or the way out," Fortmann said. "It's very much a treasured site."

With the fort wishing to look its best for its 60th anniversary this year, the volunteers' work will be important, she said.

"I think it's wonderful that they're taking time out from their busy lives to help us," Fortmann said. "I think they'll go away feeling really good about what they've done."

HOWARD BUCK covers schools and education. He can be reached at 360-735-4515 or howard.buck@columbian.com.