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Guest Column: Youth Service Weekend kicks off with a bang

Larry Caper II and Brock Grosso

On Friday, April 24, local Battle Creek high school students kicked off this year's Global Youth Service Weekend with a bang. As a powerful end to this year's National Volunteer Week, over 250 youth from area high schools volunteered their time in hopes of making a lasting difference in our community. The goal of Friday was not only to make an immediate impact on our local community, but also to instill and inspire a lifetime of volunteerism into our local citizens.

The event was created by the United Way of Greater Battle Creek, in partnership with HandsOn Battle Creek and the Area Educators' Task Force, as a vessel to assemble youth to address the needs of their community through service. This project was planned and organized by a committee consisting of students from St. Philip, Battle Creek Central, Pennfield, Lakeview, Harper Creek and South Hill Academy. With our oversight, and the supervision of the United Way and HandsOn, we were able to make this event a reality.

The day started at 8 a.m., when students from Battle Creek Central, Lakeview, Harper Creek, St. Philip, Pennfield and South Hill Academy met at the Battle Creek Family YMCA to begin their day. They were then taken to various locations around the city for a morning of volunteering. These locations included the Food Bank of South Central Michigan, Kingman Museum, Leila Arboretum, S.A.F.E. Place, Habitat for Humanity and many more. Our hope was that during those three hours of volunteering we, as a community of youth, were able to make a visible difference in our city.

We also hope that this event inspired our community. We are in an age of economic struggle, an age where everyone must be willing to help one another in order for us to succeed as a society. We not only hope that this experience inspired those youth that participated in the event to take advantage of volunteer opportunities in the future, but that it also shows every member of our city that it only takes a few hours of your time to make a difference. Volunteering is a domino effect, and we hope a chain reaction of service was started with our efforts.

We would like to recognize all those who participated in the event. Whether you were one of the youth volunteering, one of the agencies facilitating projects, or one of the organizers working behind the scenes, your contribution does not go unnoticed. Your hard work and dedication are an example all of us should follow.

On behalf of all the youth who participated in this event, we are issuing a challenge. We are challenging each individual who is reading this column to pick up where we left off and give some of their time to help others, whether it's participating in local volunteer events hosted by HandsOn Battle Creek, or just making small efforts to improve the lives of those around you. We challenge all of us to do our part in showing that Battle Creek is a community that cares; we challenge all of you to not let National Volunteer Week end.

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