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Teens take time to help others

Barrett Newkirk
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High school students from around Battle Creek spent most of their Friday not in class, but volunteering for more than a dozen charities.

As part of its first ever Youth Day of Caring event, the United Way of Greater Battle Creek recruited more than 250 students from six schools to clean city parks and assist local nonprofits.

Meredith Mahoney was one of about 22 students from Lakeview High School cleaning up leaves near Willard Beach on Friday morning.

"We got involved because we wanted to do one more volunteer activity this year," said Mahoney, who is her senior class's vice president. "It's a good project for everyone to do. And since it's the first year, I think it's something we'll continue to do."

Organizers hope to make the event an annual opportunity to encourage volunteerism in teens. It coincides with the Global Youth Service Day, an effort to recognize the contributions that young people make in their communities.

"It's wonderful. Especially with the economy right now, our state needs all the help it can get," said Lakeview social studies teacher Leah Brady, who chaperoned the students raking and bagging leaves in preparation for the beach's scheduled opening on Memorial Day.

Along with the upperclassmen from Lakeview, their peers from St. Philip, Battle Creek Central, Pennfield, Harper Creek and South Hill Academy high schools helped out at 15 sites around the city.

At U.S. Lumber, students from five schools worked together loading trucks with building materials the company was donating to Habitat for Humanity.

Cassidy Perkins, a junior at St. Philip Catholic Central, said about half the school was out volunteering Friday. She chose to help with the Habitat project because she has helped the organization before.

Perkins and about 20 other students removed light fixtures and ceiling tiles from a building U.S. Lumber planned to demolish. All the materials will be sold at Habitat's Restore outlet to raise money for the home-building charity.

"It was fun, especially with the different kids around," said Gurjeet Siningh, a senior at Battle Creek Central. "The most I gained was meeting others not just from my school."

Barrett Newkirk can be reached at 966-0692 or bnewkirk@gannett.com.