

Ross McKenzie
April 23, 2008
Harvesters

Helping with Harvesters:
Take Two

As a new semester began with Honors class, I had to once again choose a service learning partner. I had the option of choosing a new partner or starting up with a new partner. I remembered how rewarding it had been last semester with Harvesters and decided almost without decision to stay on with Harvesters. After making that decision, I contacted the volunteer coordinator and began to set up my service hours.

When setting up my service hours I remembered how much better an experience it was to go to the Renaissance Fair rather than serve all my hours in the Volunteer Outreach Center. Because of this I was quick to sign up for activities other than the VOC. I did work for Harvesters at their garden, where food is grown to distribute to the community in addition to the food donations in the warehouse, and at the simulated emergency response center in Raytown. Of course, I still had to spend some time in the VOC putting in hours, but that's not all I did.

However, the time I spent in the VOC was just as valuable as the time I spent there last semester. Last semester I observed that there is good in the community when I worked with Joe, another college student volunteering for Harvesters, but I experienced something slightly different this semester.

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While working in the VOC, I met three interesting people. I didn't get their names, but I remember each of them clearly. All three of them had one thing in common; they were all forced to be there. They had been court ordered to fulfill a set amount of community service hours at Harvesters' VOC. Two of them had been pulled over when they had been drinking and the third got caught relieving himself on the side of a building. My interactions with these people made me realize that most of the work that got done at Harvesters' VOC was probably done by people who weren't volunteers. This made me have my doubts about how good this community really was until I worked alongside a large group from a Parkville area middle school. The group was full of kids who were eager to help out at Harvesters. They were doing something really great for the community, and having fun while doing so. I realized then that the court ordered workers, may not have chose work at Harvesters, but the court had assigned them there. By assigning the offenders to work at Harvesters the court did two great things for the community. First, the court deterred the offenders from breaking the law again by forcing them to do something they didn't want to. Second, the court provided food for the needy in the community by making the offenders help out at the VOC. Both of these things were for the good of the community, and boosted my overall opinion of what Harvesters does for its community.

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Another interesting aspect I had the opportunity to experience this semester was the shopping floor. At Harvesters headquarters, the shopping floor is an opportunity for low income families to buy groceries for a cheaper price than at the grocery store. While on the shopping floor I was put in charge of organizing the items in glass containers. There were all sorts of products ranging from pickles and mayonnaise to pickled pigs' feet. I was glad to see that Harvesters gave people who do not appreciate receiving charity a place to provide for their families.

I also worked in Harvesters' garden this semester, which was nostalgic in a way. I grew up on a farm and spent all my time outside when I was growing up. Also, when I got old enough, I began to help out on the farm and in my mom's garden. Lending a hand in Harvesters' garden wasn't an unusual experience for me, and I had no problem getting dirty while doing it. Most of my time in the garden at Harvesters was spent pulling weeds from the beds. When Marisa told me I was going to pull weeds, I didn't figure there would be too many due to the cold spring we'd had. I was wrong, however, and the resilient little plants were all over. I spent some time pulling weeds alongside other volunteer gardeners, but wasn't done once I finished that job. I then had to rake the beds where they had been trampled by careless feet and also rake the rocks outside the beds to

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prevent sunlight from aiding the growth of more weeds. I wish the spring had warmed up sooner so that I could have spent more time in the garden than I did, but the time I did spend in the garden felt just like home.

The most interesting experience I had with Harvesters this semester was volunteering in Raytown at the simulated emergency response center. The event took place at a Baptist Church, and was operated by volunteers. The reason it took place was to prepare those who would volunteer in case of an emergency. The simulation was that there was a disastrous flood in the area, and volunteers were needed to respond and help the community. The center was prepared throughout the building in a circular path with different tables along the way. The first table was for registration, where you would put down your information, availability and skills. After the people at the table read through your information they put a colored sticker on your papers signifying your skill level and availability. Once you got to the second table, the people there would reread your papers, check the sticker and change it if need be. After that they would give you a new paper with a recommended job and send you on. At the third table, the workers would look at the recommended job and either send you on to the next table if jobs were still open for that position, or send you home to await a call when your services were needed. Once at the fourth station, workers would give you

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an armband with your name and job number on it and send you on. The fifth station's purpose was for insurance and liability reasons. The sixth station varied depending on your job, and once you found the appropriate station, you were assigned hours to work.

When the process was being explained to us, the leader of the group told us to go through multiple times in order to have the table workers experience different scenarios. He said as we went through we could be honest about our information or completely make something up. I went through three times.

The first time I went through as myself and filled out the papers being completely honest about my skills and availability. I was inspected at table one, given a sticker for medium skill level and low availability and sent on to table two. At table two the worker approved my papers, recommended a job and sent me on. Table three was where my trek around the tables ended. The job that had been recommended for me was full and so I was "sent home" to await a phone call when I was needed. Since I didn't make it very far through the chain of tables the first time, I decided to stretch the truth a little bit on my next personality.

On my second go-round, I was Gene Simmons. I listed that I knew how to operate heavy machinery and could drive a semi. I also wrote down

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that I had been there for hurricane Katrina and helped by clearing debris. The lady at the first table obviously didn't know who Gene Simmons was because she congratulated me on my spotless record and service to the country, gave me a sticker for high skills and high availability and sent me on to table two. The worker at table two was a little more glam-rock savvy and easily guessed that I was making up a scenario. She laughed as she recommended a job for me and sent me on. The people at table three also didn't have a clue to who Gene Simmons was and sent me on to table four. Like at table two, table four knew I was faking but gave me my wristband and sent me to be briefed on insurance and liabilities. When I made it to my appropriate job station I was assigned work hours and was completely done before the worker realized that I was not actually Gene Simmons.

On my third time through I decided to pick a musician more people would know. As Bob Marley I made my way to table one. There was an old man seated at table one who knew who Bob Marley was but didn't mind that I was role-playing. He checked my list, which had fewer skills than Simmons but similar availability, and sent me on with a medium skill, high availability sticker. He either missed the fact that I had written down a conviction for possession of marijuana as Bob Marley or didn't mind sending a marijuana user to help others. Table two's workers laughed when they called for Bob

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Marley, but recommended a job and sent me on to table three. Like my actual self, Marley was sent home early with a promised call.

Overall, this semester with Harvesters has been valuable and educational while still being fun. I learned more about how Harvesters headquarters works, reaffirmed my faith in the good of the community and also got to have fun pretending to be Bob Marley and Gene Simmons. I can already predict what service learning partner I am going to pick for next semester.