

Community Service Day Emphasizes a Core Value

The first week of law school for beginning UW students has much in common with the first week at most law schools around the country—an orientation to the school and to the legal education process, as well as socializing, book buying, and welcoming speeches. But the UW Law School's Community Service Day, which has been a part of new student orientation for many years, offers a different experience for UW law students and provides an important introduction to a core value of the legal profession—service to the community.

For seven years, the second day of the UW Law School's orientation week has been reserved for organized volunteer projects. According to Dean Ken Davis, "Community Service Day has become an important way to introduce our entering students to their future profession and to the community. Each year, as our students spend the day working together to make a difference, we strengthen the connections between the Law School and the Madison community. Community Service Day also provides an opportunity for us to showcase our Law in Action philosophy."

Community Service Day, conceived by former Assistant Dean of Students Meg Gaines, and now organized through the efforts of the Student Bar Association (SBA) and Assistant Dean of Students Ruth Robarts, introduces students to the importance of public service.

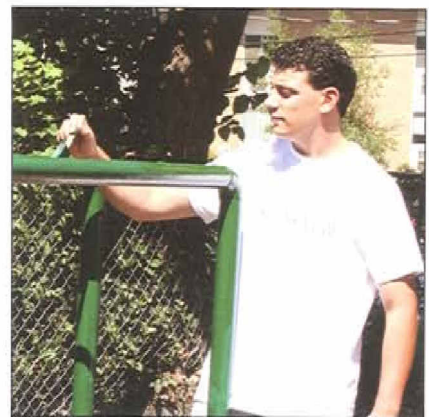
Students join with new classmates in their small-section groups and are assigned to a site in the Madison area to assist those who need help the most in the community. This year, the Class of 2008, with approximately 270 students, worked on much-needed maintenance projects at nonprofit organizations throughout Madison, including the Red Cross, the Wil-Mar Community Center, the UW Children's Hospital, the Madison Urban League, and the UW Arboretum.

A number of the participating organizations count on the Law School's help each year and have become important community partners. This year, the Early Childhood Learning Center, a site UW Law students have returned to year after year, honored Robarts during Community Service Day, naming her their 2005 Hero. The center also benefits from donations and volunteer efforts by the Student Bar Association at Thanksgiving and Christmas.

But Community Service Day is not only about community service and hard work—it's also about meeting new people and developing a team approach. After a day of physical labor, the student groups return to the Law School for a barbecue, allowing them the opportunity to extend the friendships forged throughout the day and share their enthusiasm about their experiences and their next three years in Madison.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF RUTH ROBARTS



First-year students contribute a day of service to various Madison community programs.