

Charity and camaraderie at Catholic HEART Workcamp

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The Orlando-based Catholic HEART Workcamp provides teens with a chance to clean up their image as well as their community in a week-long camp centered around faith-powered mission work.

The Nashville branch of the camp was hosted by Father Ryan High School July 2-8.

“The facilities are perfect for us,” said Tom Caprera, the local manager of the camp along with Steve Mackey. Caprera and Mackey, parishioners at St. Philip Church in Franklin, began preparing for the camp in January, finding worksites and organizing the almost 300 registered teenagers into groups of five or six, each group presided over by an adult leader.

Caprera and Mackey worked with Nashville outfits such as Project Reflect, Safe Haven, South Nashville Community Organization and Graceworks to line up the camp’s service projects. The profit for those at the worksites is as great as the eye-opening experience for the teens: the adults are shown that there are good teenagers doing good things in this world. The camp offers a different view of youth actions, defying teen stereotypes. They are motivated by their faith to help others. Said Caprera, “They have the spirit in them.”

The Workcamp was founded in 1993 by Steve and Lisa Walker. There were only 100

The campers hail from across the nation and many have attended past Catholic HEART Workcamps in other cities. Courtney Frahm, 18, and Tara Glynn, 17, traveled to Nashville with their youth group from Mokena, Ill. Both girls have participated in the camp before and they returned this year because of the camp’s personal rewards. You see how thankful you should be, said Frahm.

Not only do the teenagers offer up a week of their summer to help others, they pay for the experience. The fee goes toward their food and housing. The host high school is chosen by Orlando, and this is the third summer that Father Ryan has hosted the camp. The campers are responsible for making their own way to the host school, and many drive across the country with their church youth group.

The days start early, with a 6:45 a.m. morning call that leads into long hours at the worksite in the overbearing Nashville humidity, but the teens don’t mind; it is a learning experience for all involved.

Julian Hannack, 16, of Hudson, Wis., enjoys such volunteer work because “it gets me a lot closer to God and closer to my faith.” To see the change in people, he said, that’s the reward. “You can always do better than you’re doing.”

Of course, it isn’t all work for

Nashville is one of the camps this year with the “Take It To The Next Level” theme. This theme can only be attended by 10-12 graders and it offers more spiritual components: Adoration, Reconciliation, the rosary and daily Mass celebrated by Father Geoff Rose, OSFS, of Michigan.

Martina Condron, volunteer coordinator for the Campus for Human Development’s Room in the Inn program, is one of the individuals who benefited from the teens’ time and effort. The campers reorganized the Room in the Inn blanket shed and painted a job resource room where residents can e-mail and fax their résumés.

The campers don’t always do the best job, said Mackey, but the point is that they’re doing something.

The Catholic HEART Workcamp gathers faithful minds and charitable hearts for the good of others. The benefit for everyone involved, said Camp Director Brian Reinhart, is “to be a part of helping people put faith into action, to build relationships with people you’re not usually exposed to.”



participants in Orlando's first camp. Today, there are hundreds of parishes and thousands of teens involved. From June 11 to Aug. 5, there are about four camps per week. The same week as the Nashville camp, there were Catholic HEART Workcamps in Charlotte, Lexington and San Antonio.

the teenagers. The evenings feature skits put on by the campers, as well as prayer, reflection, videos, talks given by the staff and worship music by Andy Cloninger and Walker Sherman. There is a different theme each night followed by Affirmation. There is also a free day in the week for them to travel around the city to Nashville Shores, the Grand Ole Opry and the Nashville Zoo.



Photos by Theresa Laurence

Top photo: Third-year Catholic Heart Work Camp participant Courtney Ryan of Mokena, Ill., spent the week of July 4 in Nashville, working on a home improvement project. Here, Ryan paints a house in the Crieve Hall neighborhood belonging to a paraplegic woman who was cheated by her contractor while remodeling her home to be completely wheelchair accessible. CHWC campers spread throughout the city doing service projects at individual homes and social service agencies.

Bottom photo: Eric Miller, left, Ashley Daily and Sean Hutchins of Morton, Ill., participate in praise and worship music during the Thursday night program of Catholic Heart Work Camp at Father Ryan High School. The charismatic evening program, which mixes song, prayer, skits, videos and talks, is a key component of the camp, whose mission is “to empower participants to live as disciples of Christ through serving others.”