



# Stony Brook Serves

a Career Center publication

Volume V, Issue III

April 2013

Sponsored by the Career Center at Stony Brook University

## AmeriCorps Spotlight: Jaymin & Sanatkumar Patel

by Yael Saint-Armond



AmeriCorps is a nationally funded volunteer program that allows members of all ages and backgrounds to serve through a network of partnerships with local and national nonprofit groups. Two brothers, determined to make their mark, strive to make a difference in the communities they have opted to volunteer in. Jaymin and Sanat Patel aim to become future physicians, and their work with AmeriCorps is an extension of that dream. Jaymin, the older of the two brothers, understood the necessity of selfless service. He entered AmeriCorps at the direction of two members, Krupa Patel and Justin Thomas. He wanted to understand the meaning of service and participate in an organization that would not only supplement, but enrich his college experience. Now in his second year, he is a current volunteer in the Child Life Program at SBU Hospital,

where he engages children in a variety of activities to minimize their anxiety. The Child Life Program seeks to relieve stress that pediatric patients may experience during their hospitalization.

Not too far from his brother is Sanat, who also volunteers with the Child Life Program. He too believes in the necessity of service. As an aspiring physician, he believes that one must be constantly engaged with individuals of different cultures and backgrounds and working with children places a focus on the sensitivity and understanding that a caring physician needs.

Recently, the brothers expanded their service beyond Stony Brook and joined ASBO, Alternative Spring Break Outreach, on their volunteer trip to Louisiana. There, they worked with a New Orleans Head Start Program, assisting children in their daily classroom activities. They painted, played, instructed, made friends, and most importantly, napped after snack time! Jaymin immediately understood the need to volunteer. He recognized the impact that outside influences have on children's lives. When I asked, "Why children?", he responded, smiling, "One must nurture their characters because they are prone (Continued on Page)

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## **AmeriCorps Spotlight: Cont'd**

*by Yael Saint-Armand*

to outside influences and by volunteering, I am no more than a medium, a guide to help them to develop as they mature, even if it is by letting them draw on my face!” Sanat’s reasons ran a little closer to home. Growing up, he witnessed as his older brother struggled to find his place within the educational system. He was left back twice, due to the language and culture barriers that he faced, and coupled with his parents’ lack of education, he knew from then, he would do whatever was in his power to actively participate in all children’s lives. “I took care of the kids as if they were my own. In post-Katrina New Orleans, I witnessed a terrible scene, but above all, I witnessed resilience. When I looked in the kids’ faces, I didn’t see broken homes, absentee parents, or pain, no, I saw nothing but hope. These kids refused to be victims of circumstance and I was touched by that.” Jaymin and Sanat work tirelessly with children to make sure that they understand their own potential. Their experiences in the Child Life Program and ASBO are examples of their dedication to the youth.

Currently Jaymin and Sanat serve as President and Treasurer, respectively, of the Undergraduate Biochemistry Club. Since stepping foot on Stony Brook’s campus, they have been on the Dean’s List every semester. They have also done copious amounts of research and have shadowed a number of physicians in the university’s hospital. Upon graduating, Jaymin will most likely attend SUNY Upstate Medical University to pursue a career in either Pediatrics or Emergency Medicine. Meanwhile, Sanat will continue to navigate his way through his courses as a Biochemistry and Philosophy double major and Chemistry minor. One wonders how they have had the time to volunteer and continue to serve through AmeriCorps. Ultimately, both brothers hope to build a hospital in their home country of India, and share that dream with their people. When asked, “How do you do it?” Jaymin responded succinctly: “You need a dream bigger than yourself”.

## **Residence Hall Association: Enhancing Residential Life**

*by Kristina Kuznetsova*

SBU’s Residence Hall Association (RHA) is perhaps the most direct organization with regards to its connection to students. It is run by students with futures in leadership, who strive to improve and enhance residential life for those living on campus, as well as to make sure that the views and concerns of the on-campus community are heard and acknowledged. With the help of professional staff, committees are created within the organization that “target specific aspects of building community.” The groups focus on goals ranging from social issues to educational programs and relationships with other schools within the area.

holds many philanthropic events in which students can participate. This year, the members of RHA teamed up with The National Residence Hall Honorary and Seawolves Against Cancer to organize the drive that provided samples from over 800 potential bone marrow donors for the Bone Marrow Registry. In addition, RHA collaborates with schools in the area via an organization called North East Affiliate of College and University Residence halls to support two philanthropies a year. In addition to the traditional bake sales and awareness programs, RHA took their first step towards becoming more active in the community with its Saturday of Service program. During this event, fifteen philanthropic student groups were invited to come together and support their causes through activities of their own design. It gave residents a chance to acquire information about the different community service opportunities on campus.

RHA events to look out for this month include their Residential Leadership Awards on April 16th, Earthstock, during which informational and carnival game tables will be displayed on April 19th, and the RHA Masquerade Ball: Beauty and the Geek on April 20th.

## Interfaith Center: Many Faiths, One Goal

by Olivia Basileo



*Photo courtesy of Joy Gluzman.*

The Stony Brook University Interfaith Center is an organization that brings together people of Judaism, Christianity and Islam to perform community service. In order to show their devotion and love for God, the students are committed to helping others in their communities. Students, chaplains and staff all volunteer their time to the cause. These students, despite following different belief systems, put their differences aside and focus on their shared values as they express their love for God through action.

This semester, members of the Interfaith Center participated in Hurricane Sandy relief. Students from the Catholic Campus

Ministry, the Hillel Center for Jewish Life and the Asian Christian Campus Ministry went to a home in East Patchogue that had been flooded by the storm. Working together, they cleaned out the entire basement, which had been filled to the ceiling with water and left unattended to for months. Even more emotional, however, was the destruction of countless personal items—photo albums, awards, stuffed toys, books, clothing—all of which needed to be placed into trash bags and discarded. The amount of water damage left only roughly one-percent of the owner's things intact.

The Interfaith team worked tirelessly to go through these mementos and clean out the basement. They then took apart the drywall and ceiling, which had both been infected by mold. It was an enormous project that these students took on. Joanne Buonocore, the Catholic Campus minister, describes, "Hazmat suits, hard hats, waterproof construction boots, goggles, breathing masks, gloves . . . in our "uniform" for the day, you could not tell who was who. There was nothing to identify each person... and we could only communicate with each other through sign language and hand signals. We didn't know who was who, but we knew we were on the same team, the Interfaith Team, all working together for a common cause."

Helping a woman who had truly been impacted by the hurricane helped the students see just how devastating the tragedy was, and how appreciative people were for their help. The hands-on activity of actually cleaning out the basement reinforced the students' desire to love others and help them through rough times. Says Joanne Buonocore, "It is one thing to know in your mind that people lost "everything" . . . it is quite another to have to shovel and bag that "everything"... and drag the remains to the sidewalk as trash." The experience was eye-opening and unifying.

During a lunch break, the students had a chance to interact and become friends while sharing food that they had brought. Perhaps the most lasting influence of the Interfaith Center on these students—aside from nurturing the desire to work hard and help others—is the realization that they are not so different in their beliefs. Having the chance to do something great for someone who had been hurt allowed these students to bond.

The Interfaith Center can be found on the second floor of the Student Union.



*Photo courtesy of Joy Gluzman.*

## Our Veterans, Our Community

by Victoria Vollaro



Photo courtesy of Patrick Julian.

As if our soldiers fighting overseas do not do enough for our country, there are many veterans that feel they want to do even more when they come home. VESO, Stony Brook University's Veteran Student Organization, is an affiliate of the Student Veterans of America, a coalition of student veteran groups on college campuses across the United States. They are a new organization on campus looking to make an impact on the community. VESO began in early 2000 by Lissette Linan, an Air Force vet and now published author. Pat Julian explains, "She wanted to bring together the vets on the campus for navigating school life and the VA [veteran affairs]." VESO has five primary goals: meeting educational needs by composing study groups, meeting financial needs, promoting

military awareness in the student population, community service and addressing the individual veteran's needs.

To get their name out there, they have held several presentations with various college groups and Veteran's Affairs reps. They also work with the Suffolk and Nassau County Veteran groups, have sent volunteers over to the Stony Brook Vet Home for active work study, and every Christmas, participate in the Toys for Tots fundraiser.

When asked, "What is unique about this organization?" Pat explained, "Our diversity. We cross all demographics, all majors, and wide age range (22-60's), all races and religions. This brings an assortment of experience like no other." He says his favorite part about being in this organization is "Being around other vets [...] The military experience has many similar experiences whether Coast Guard, National Guard, or Marines, active or reserve."

At the end of April/beginning of May they are going to be running a book donation for fiction and nonfiction books and textbooks. Anyone can be a member of VESO or even come to the weekly meetings. Pat says they would "love to answer questions people have and engage to the student body." VESO holds weekly meeting in the Union in Room 221.

## From Those Who Serve—What Does Service Mean to You?

by Kristina Kuznetsova

"It means a lot to me that people adopt pets that desperately need homes, despite their age."

**-Melanie Sinesi, Senior**

"I like that it means putting the needs of others before your own. It means giving a part of yourself to those around you, and expecting nothing in return."

**-Heather Bingham, Senior**

"I like helping people. It's just something I do."

**-Stephanie Persich, Senior**

## **Spring into Service!**

*by Kristina Kuznetsova*

### **Why do you believe it is important to engage in community service?**

“Community service by definition is, ‘voluntary work intended to help people in a particular area,’ but people who offer their services will do much more than provide free labor. Those who participate in community service are learning, doing and improving themselves and the community together. It is an opportunity to provide selfless acts of kindness no matter age, class or background. Service instills the value of working hard for change, taking initiative and collaborating with others to achieve a common goal. There really is nothing more rewarding for the individual and the community at large.” **-Caitlin Walsh, Graduate Student**

“Community service benefits not only the recipient but also the contributor of service. Some might characterize it as voluntary generosity, others as an ethical imperative -- an obligatory reciprocation through generalized exchange to society at large, and to the particular communities of our locality. In our hyper-commercial modern world, where many services have been commoditized for profit, our lives have become fragmented and individualized, with increasingly tenuous bonds to people beyond our immediate social networks. Our sense of social being is highly dependent upon the interpersonal relationships with (sic) develop with people from all walks of life, with members of local communities of diverse origins, definition and composition. Participating in direct service and cooperative engagement builds greater empathy with, and more appreciative understanding of, others in our broader social fellowships. Service helps to foster community and to strengthen social bonds; it builds leadership skills while developing a more conscious sense of our own humanity and our commonalities. People experience very different motivations ‘to get involved,’ and may serve in very different ways, from established institutional relationships to imaginatively creative individual initiatives. It starts with a simple willingness to give of one's time, a willingness to share of one's self.”

**-Professor Gregory Ruf, Asian American Studies & Anthropology**

“I think engaging in community service is important because it creates opportunities for people of very different backgrounds to interact with one another. When a person volunteers in the community, they find themselves in an environment that is different from their job and with people that they do not interact with on a regular basis. For example, I volunteer to judge high school science fairs and to help put on sensory-friendly Broadway shows for children with Autism. Through meeting these people, I believe that my perspective of the world around me is broadened and I am more mindful of the various experiences that other human beings in my community are having. I am able to think beyond the realm of my daily life at work and school. Conversely, I think that the families also benefit to see that other people care and will use their time to create positive experiences for others. Overall, I think that community service builds connections that would not otherwise exist amongst people who live near each other and that these connections are extremely important for building a sensitive and caring environment for everyone to live in.”

**-Megan Tudor, Graduate Student**

### **Submit Your Articles!**

The Career Center encourages students, faculty, and staff to get involved with community service activities. Our publication is the place to share your stories with the Stony Brook community! Submit articles and photos, share information about projects, and list upcoming events. Please send all submissions to **Taryn Kutujian, Internship Consultant, Career Center**, at [taryn.kutujian@stonybrook.edu](mailto:taryn.kutujian@stonybrook.edu). Be sure to include your name, phone number, and email address.

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