

P NORTHWEST PASSAGES

THE PEOPLE AND PLACES OF NORTHWEST WASHINGTON

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AU freshmen connect to D.C. seniors via service

By **LAURA L. THORNTON**
Current Correspondent

Anthony Catanzaro could have spent another week of summer vacation at home on Long Island before moving into a dormitory at American University to begin his freshman year of college. Instead, Catanzaro reported to school a week early to participate in the university's 21st annual

Freshman Service Experience, a four-day event that engages the university's newest students with their new community. He joined more than 600 other American University freshmen — over half of the incoming class.

"I thought it would be a really great way to meet people ... and learn about the city," said Catanzaro, who spent last week volunteering at the Washington Home and Community Hospices

in Tenleytown.

American University freshmen volunteered at more than 50 sites across D.C. and the Maryland and Virginia suburbs last week, said sophomore Megan Elkin, the team leader for the two-dozen students who volunteered at the Washington Home. Sites included schools, farms and retirement homes.

The students anticipated logging 14,000 hours of community service during

the week, said Aaron Grushkin, a freshman from Durango, Colo., who volunteered at Friendship Terrace, a Tenleytown retirement community.

Grushkin and 10 other students spent last week helping residents of Friendship Terrace to de-clutter their apartments and clean out their closets. They also painted patio furniture and vacuumed hallways.

On Thursday after lunch, students and Friendship Terrace resi-



Bill Petros/The Current

American University freshmen volunteered throughout the region last week to kick off their first year of college. Above, students Megan Elkin and Anthony Catanzaro visit with Washington Home resident Jan Simko. Left, Haley Lynn and Hana Le assist resident Jim Bermingham in making a cast of his hand.

dents played bingo together, chatting between rounds and enjoying cakes and lemonade served by the students.

"It's been a really cool experience," said Grushkin, who enjoyed listening to residents share their stories about living in Washington.

"I'm not familiar with D.C.," he said, "and the program seemed like

a fun way to do some ... work and see D.C."

For Frank Short, president of the residents association at Friendship Terrace, the students' presence "livens up the place very much."

"Many residents have commented on how much they've enjoyed having them here," Short

said, "and we're happy to have them back."

At the Washington Home, student volunteers performed a variety of tasks, including cleaning up flood-damaged rooms, delivering phone books to residents' rooms and providing company for the residents, several of whom are over

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Corcoran Gallery community project has amateur artists in pieces

By **TEKE WIGGIN**
Current Correspondent

A little girl wearing pigtails and pink glasses chatters in Spanish with her mother and brother as she sketches on a small white square of paper. Following a rogue pencil stroke, she tilts her head and squints. Turning to her mother, she mutters in a rising pitch of disappointment. Her mother returns words curtly.

"But I didn't know that's here," the girl says, breaking into English and pointing at a larger picture set next to her square sheet.

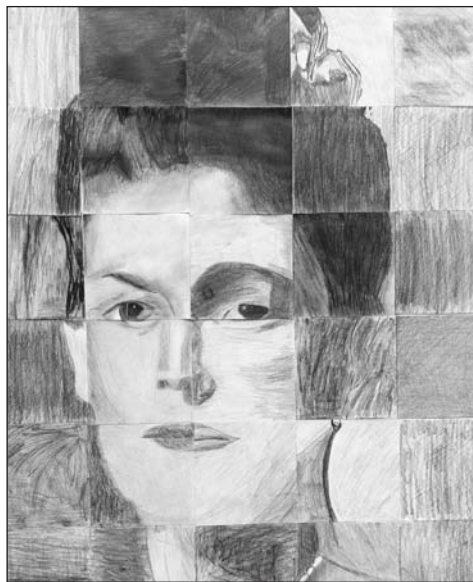
A man standing nearby lifts his head sharply at the words of regret like a rabbit pricking its ears to a crackle in the brush.

He walks over to the girl and peers over her shoulder with attentive eyes.

"Oh, that's OK," he says soothingly. "No one could have seen that."

The girl grunts in acceptance.

Along with a diverse group — packs of friends, weekend visitors, couples or just lone art enthusiasts — the girl and her family sat at a table in the Corcoran Gallery of Art's giant atrium. Each student tried his or her hand at a "gridded value drawing" for the



Courtesy of the Corcoran

In the Corcoran's Community Art Project, visitors contributed their renditions of pieces of a collection masterpiece. Above, visitors re-created a detail of John Singer Sargent's 1883 painting "Margaret Stuyvesant Rutherford (Mrs. Henry White)."

museum's Community Art Project, part of the Corcoran's Free Summer Saturdays

series, which will continue through Sept. 4. Now in its second year, the program pro-

vides free summer admission, gallery tours, workshops, demonstrations and performances to promote the museum's exhibits and offer artistic enjoyment to the D.C. community.

As she stood at a table furnished with pencils, kneaded erasers and rulers ready for the taking, internship and volunteer coordinator Katie Funk explained the take-away. The event, she said, like all other Free Summer Saturdays projects, gives participants "a little more of a connection and appreciation" for featured exhibits.

"People are staying in the museum longer, just having a more interactive experience," she said.

The featured exhibit that day was "Chuck Close Prints: Process and Collaboration," which will run through Sept. 12. Close explored the technique of print portraiture by superimposing grids over photographs in order to break them down into a series of squares, each to be approached as its own artistic undertaking.

Borrowing the technique, the community art project — which was completed last weekend — divvied up grid units from pieces See **Corcoran**/Page 18

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SERVICE

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100 years old.

"It's been really nice having them here," said communications director Mollie Haines.

"There's a lot of energy ... around young people," she said. "When young people are here, it creates a special tone. ... It's party time. ... I wish we could bottle the vibrancy of youth."

Haines added that because the Washington Home is a long-term-care facility, it is also a home, and volunteers are

always welcome to help with maintenance and landscaping projects, "because our surroundings impact how we feel."

But the "people projects" — "anything that gives people a way to connect," Haines said — are also important. Early in the week, student volunteers helped residents make plaster casts of their hands — an interactive, hands-on activity that helps residents stay intimately connected with other people.

"As we age ... our world shrinks, and any connection with people outside that world is a lovely benefit," Haines said.

For the students, "the main thing is that

we're engaging in the community," said Elkin, who hails from Wisconsin and is considering majoring in law and society.

"Community service isn't just picking up garbage from the street," Elkin added.

"Serving is great, but the main thing we want is to engage."

During their lunch breaks, students explored the neighborhoods in which they were volunteering, eating at local establishments and learning how to navigate the Metrorail system.

It's been a "great way to explore the city without the pressure" of schoolwork and exams, said Catanzaro.



Bill Petros/The Current

Students Megan Elkin, Andrew Presnal and Anthony Catanzaro visit Jan Simko.



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CORCORAN

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in the Corcoran's permanent collection of art. Upon completion, participants tape their squares onto a gridded poster set on an easel.

Corcoran artist-in-residence Matt Haughn oversaw the project from its late-July start. Patrolling tables covered with stray lead marks, he gave advice to participants, sometimes taking the form of consolation, as it did with his frustrated young artist.

"We've had kids show up ... just afraid of drawing and once I sat down with them and explained it's not the whole area, it's just that little square ... it's really inspired some kids and adults to try and pick this up," he said.

A D.C. public school teacher, Haughn originally introduced the style to his classes at Sousa Middle School in Southeast. He started by splitting up Shepard Fairey's iconic

Obama campaign image into squares and then moved on to portraits of black visionaries like Martin Luther King Jr. and Frederick Douglass. Eventually he submitted some of his classes' finished prints to a local art show. That got him noticed by the Corcoran and ultimately landed him a gig as instructor for the Community Art Project.

Haughn says the grid method renders sketching more approachable. Many people are willing to give the technique a shot, he said.

"It's kind of freed them up to see that everyone is capable of doing this," he said. "People who have never drawn before and experienced artists come in."

Haughn lauds the Corcoran for putting on the project, along with the related events, calling the practice innovative and original for a museum.

"That's what makes the Corcoran unique," he said.

"They're willing to step up and get

people involved in art."

George Washington University couple Jessica Sloan and Logan Jones agreed.

"Museums so often treat the interactive part as just for kids," Sloan said, adding that she was excited she finally could join in the fun.

"It makes it more personal," chimed in boyfriend Jones.

Jonathan Harlande, a George Washington University international relations major, sat at another table. He'd been at his sketch for almost a half-hour, and was laboring over the last details. Harlande said having an opportunity to sketch a grid square had enriched the gallery experience for him as well.

"Drawing through the square is a way of focusing on details and getting to know the painting better," he said. "It's a better way of understanding the artist."

He said he is looking forward to finding the picture he had been sketching inside the gallery, a desire the Corcoran aims to inspire with the program.

A little ways away, on the steps up to the galleries, another Free Summer Saturdays event unfolded. David Ibata, a Corcoran College of Art + Design alum tasked with performing weekly public chalk drawings, stared pensively at a large blank piece of paper propped on an easel.

Steadying his drawing hand with a maul, he dabbed the paper with chalk to make his first sketch marks.

Usually, Ibata stands at 17th Street and New York Avenue as passersby huddle around him to watch him sketch nearby objects. But this past Saturday, inside the Corcoran, he had less of an audience.

Still, one museum visitor stopped to observe, staring quizzically at the sparse sketch marks.

"That's awesome, that's really interesting," the man said.

"I haven't started yet," Ibata said. He craned his neck. "It's very modern, I guess."

The final day of the series, Sept. 4, will feature various activities including an opportunity for visitors to sketch a live model and a concert. To learn more about the Saturday events, visit

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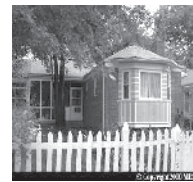
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