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Included below is a press release regarding Ferris State University students who are choosing an alternative spring break option – volunteering to help others. Further information is available by contacting Leah Nixon, assistant director of News Services.

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### **Ferris students strap on their work boots, spend spring break volunteering**

BIG RAPIDS – While many students will spend spring break lounging in the sun, some Ferris State University students will give up their tans for blisters and travel to New York and New Orleans to volunteer for Habitat for Humanity and Wesley House.

Ten students from Ferris' Habitat for Humanity registered student organization will travel to New Rochelle, N.Y., for a week to work jointly with a Westchester County Habitat for Humanity construction crew building a home. Sophomore honor student Kiersten Swantek, a Nuclear Medicine Technology major and secretary for Habitat for Humanity at Ferris, helped develop this alternative spring break.

“Our chapter has toyed with the idea of an alternative spring break, and last year we made that dream a reality,” Swantek said. “We hope to participate in Habitat International’s Collegiate Challenge annually because it provides our members the chance to do good in the community, and grow and bond together.”

Last year, the group went on its first Collegiate Challenge to Erie, Penn. They shingled roofs, put up drywall, dug driveways and sidewalks, and completed many other building tasks. Although the group is also locally active throughout the year, they wanted to offer more help.

“During the semester our members are able to work on builds on the weekends, but we wanted to do more,” Swantek said. “Having the resources and tools necessary to help others, we feel called to give our time and service to help eliminate substandard housing.”

On March 4, the group left for the 13-hour trip to New York by minivan. A typical day will begin at 8 a.m. and last until 5 p.m. with a one-hour lunch break. By March 11, once the week is over, approximately 400 volunteer hours will be done.

“Doing this gives our members a better understanding of the culture in which we live,” Swantek said. “We will gain a wonderful sense of fulfilling others’ dreams. It is amazing to see your physical work and sweat go into a house.”

Another group of students volunteering during spring break is the Wesley House United

Methodist Campus Ministry. Seven Ferris students and five Grand Valley State University students will travel to New Orleans, La., to work at a Methodist children's home that caters to children who are orphans or in foster care.

The students used an organization called Youth In Mission to organize their trip. YIM is a group that organizes custom trips for ministries such as Wesley House throughout the year. YIM sets up hotel accommodations and a place for the students to work, then steps back and lets them take control. This will be the first mission trip the Wesley House has taken in three years.

"It's a great opportunity to do something out of the norm for spring break," said John Gaylord, a first-year Wesley House member and Surveying Engineering major from Kalkaska. "I hope to make a positive impact on the kids."

According to Darci Stevens, a senior from Reed City majoring in Small Business Management, the group's work at the children's home will improve not only the home but also the morale.

"In the mornings we will be doing a lot of maintenance," she said. "They don't have many adults there helping, so we will be painting, hammering and doing all of the little jobs that get pushed aside. When the kids get out of school, we will tutor them, play games with them and keep them company in general."

Although Stevens is an experienced volunteer with 11 years of mission work in four different countries, for others this is new. One such member is Ryan Bennett, a first-year member of Wesley House. Bennett decided to go on the mission trip because he thought it was a perfect opportunity to help others.

"I have been on mission trips to West Virginia and Bay City and enjoyed them both, so I am looking forward to going to New Orleans for the first time," he said.

While the group is primarily focusing on improving the children's home, they will also be playing the role of tourist and seeing the city. This will be especially interesting for second-year Wesley House member Jill Duran, who went on a mission trip to New Orleans in high school in 2001, before Hurricane Katrina ravaged the city.

"To see how different the city is will be very interesting," Duran said. "Last time, I worked with an elderly woman in a wheel chair, and now I am working with kids. I just hope to make a positive impact on everyone."

Not only will the group experience history, but they also view their trip as a part of it.

"A lot of people live in a fog and think 'it's all about me.' The kids we are going to help are between the ages of 9 and 17, and they have already been through a lot more than we ever will," Stevens said. "Many of them only have what is on their back. We will get to see how far New Orleans has come and how much farther the city needs to go. We are experiencing history, and one day we can tell our children and grandchildren that we helped after such a disaster."

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