



A kinder, gentler break

Not all students play in the sun; some help others

By Robert Miller, *Ibis*, U. of Miami

This spring break many students may be cleaning up the beaches instead of throwing up on them. In these socially conscious times, places like Homestead, Fla., are becoming more attractive to spring breakers looking for an alternative to the usual week of debauchery.

"Believe it or not, not every college student wants to go to Daytona," says Michael Magevney.

Magevney is the coordinator of Break Away, a national network of more than 200 colleges and community organizations created to aid schools in developing alternative spring break programs.

"There are many different ways you can spend your spring break," says Glenn Dubin, junior at the U. of Miami. "You can do it for yourself, or the alternative is you can do it for someone else."

Since Homestead nearly was leveled by Hurricane Andrew last August, it is now in the process of rebuilding, and relief agencies are expecting thousands of students to travel to this corner of southern Dade County to help during spring break.

"If you could give me a tent to house 3,000 people, I could fill it," says Jill Funk, Hurricane Relief coordinator.

So far, nearly 50 colleges nationwide have said they would like to send students there.

Magevney estimates at least 1,000 students will work with Habitat for Humanity and other local agencies there.

"It's stalled right now," Dubin says. "You don't see as many trucks going down. Around spring break time there will be a lot of building—it'll be a really busy time."

Several colleges, including U. of Notre Dame, West Virginia U. and Rollins College sent groups to South Florida during their fall breaks.

"You don't realize how much work needs to be done till you're down there," says Mike Arsenault, a Notre Dame sophomore from South Dade. "I felt I had a responsibility to go. It hit my neighborhood, my home."

Helping rebuild Homestead is just one of many alternatives students have this year. As many as 10,000 college students may participate in alternative break programs in sites across the country. They include home construction and repair in Appalachia, work with migrant farm workers and their families in Texas, reef cleanup in the Florida Keys, AIDS awareness efforts in San Francisco, Hurricane Hugo cleanup in South Carolina, and assistance for the homeless in Washington, D.C.

"People are considering it an option," says Donica Williams, Volunteer Services coordinator at the U. of Miami. "A lot of students don't have the time to volunteer during the year. This



While some students are basking in the sun...

gives them the opportunity to do that."

Some students say spending spring break doing service work is more fulfilling than sun worshiping or skiing.

"You can have a better time doing something constructive," Magevney says. "It really is a lot of fun."

Last year 50 students from the U. of Miami traveled to four different sites in Florida. One group built homes for migrant farm workers; another worked at a rural shelter for homeless families. Eight students taught in a grade school on the Miccosukee Indian Reservation, and another group worked in a homeless shelter in Pompano Beach.

"It is an immersion experience where the college students sleep, work and eat in the community in which they volunteer for the week," says Carrie Edmondson, director of Volunteer Services at Miami.

"In places like Daytona, you go with real high expectations, and they almost never live up to them," Dubin says. "[Alternative break] was better than I expected. I felt like I

had a chance to make a difference."

And so did Laura Mann and Magevney, who, while seniors at Vanderbilt U. in 1991, founded and institutionalized Break Away. With the help of Vanderbilt U. and the Kellogg and Ford foundations, Break Away began to fill the void for a national office to coordinate the efforts of all the different programs.

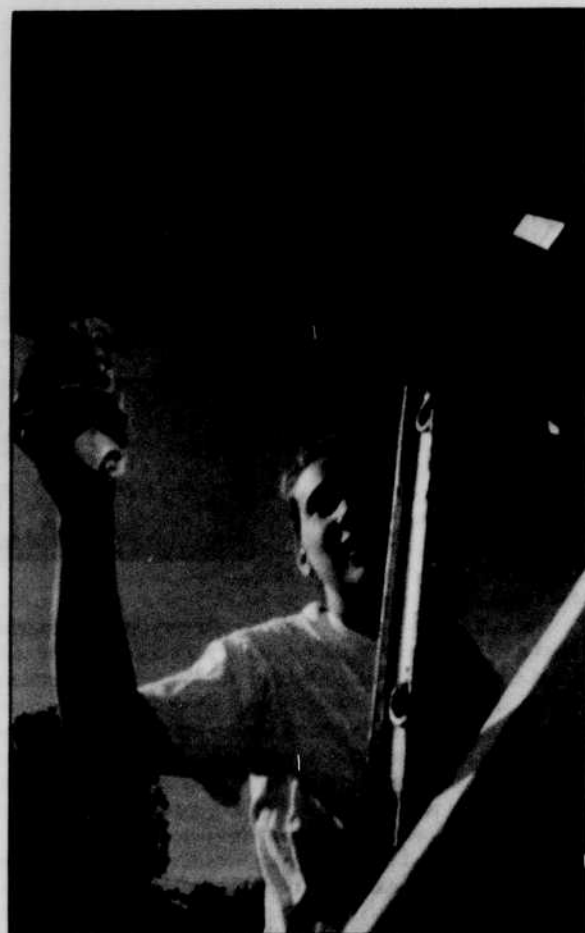
Its mission is "to promote service... which immerse students in often vastly different cultures, heighten social awareness and advocate life-long social action."

The organization acts as a clearing house for service ideas.

"All these schools were doing wonderful things, but they weren't talking to anyone else," Magevney says. "We found that our program could grow by learning what else was out there."

Now, with the help of Break Away, those programs are starting to work with each other to offer students solid alternatives to the get-drunk-and-puke option many students still prefer.

"I think when students arrive at college they believe they only



... others spend their spring breaks repairing homes.

have three options for spring break: one, party your brains off; two, go home; and three, get a job and work. Now they have the option of doing community service," Magevney says.

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