

TEENS from page 1A

"I actually like planning out my week in my head," Sam said. "Then I have time to do stuff. Right now, I'm planning the Easter Egg Hunt at Miller Park this year. Interact members have been real helpful in helping me out. But, sometimes, when I have nothing to do, it's getting everything together and figuring out my free time."

But getting to that point takes practice, particularly if someone has never volunteered before.

"The first push is so hard to get people to start volunteering," Nic said. "After getting people to get to the thing that they actually enjoy doing, they're going to keep doing it. But it's hard to get people to that point. They're like, 'Gee, I don't know... That's effort.'"

And sometimes people like volunteering but haven't found the right fit.

"I know some things I did not like doing as much as other things," he said. "Our Thanksgiving dinner we do for Kiwanis, I love doing that. It's just customer service and handling food. But there are other times when I just don't want to be there at all. Like the Rhody Run, when you're just sitting there and waiting to give people hot chocolate. I don't want to do that."

It's all about finding balance.

"You could do the smallest thing and have it matter or do something way bigger," Nic said. "It definitely helps your first time to go with friends, so you're not alone at it. And then after that, once you find something you like, enjoy it."

So, what do the teens of the Siuslaw High School enjoy about volunteering?

"We have brains"

The reasons the four teens began volunteering were all different, but even more diverse is what keeps them doing it. For Allison, it gave her a career path.

"I really like kids, and I found that out when I helped with Boys and Girls Club," she said. "That kind of pushed me towards wanting to teach. And then actually doing the tutor program has helped me communicate with people better. I wasn't really good at that."

For Nic, it's given him the opportunity to think about what he could become.

"I'm the instructor assistant for the band right now. At first it started off with helping people with their instruments and figuring out music notation. And now I'm directing a piece for intermediate band and beginning band, just to see if I want to be a director in the future. So that's a good thing to be able to do."

For Audrey, finding a volunteer opportunity to help her career isn't really feasible.

"I want to be a Bio-Medical Chemist, making medicine," she said. "I don't think anyone would want a middle or high schooler in their lab. 'What happens when I pour this in here?'"

Nic started to laugh when Audrey asked him, "Remember when Grace and I made acid on accident?"

"Yes!" Nic said. "They were like, 'Oh, if we want just one thing to be there, we can just evaporate the other thing.' Well, they heated up the flask and it ended up becoming acid. Mr. Harding was like, 'Take that away now.' You're going to kill us!"

For Sam, her job as a manager of River Roasters has helped her the most with her career path — "Because I'm getting more responsibility," she said. "Being one of the managers has helped me, because I'm going to go to college for business. But being president of Interact has helped as well, because it helped me know how to lead in the best way."

"Definitely being a president has taught me to talk in front of people," Nic said. "Having an agenda put together, especially for speeches, is really important. Being part of Builders Club and being the president of that has really helped with my speech and sometimes impromptu."

Sam agreed, saying, "It's definitely helped me work with people. Before, I wanted it all my way and I would do it all. But now, I've learned how to split up the jobs and work with everyone."

"I have to talk in front of the entire school," Audrey said. "Even during my junior year, I was really nervous about it. But after doing it so much, I can talk in front of 400 people and I don't care. It's really nice."

"It kind of forces that stage fright away," Nic added. Audrey laughed. "Class presentation with only 20 people? Easy."

But some teens seem to not really get into the spirit of volunteerism.

"I feel like some people just join clubs so they can have it on their resume," Sam said. "So when they are in the club, they don't really want to do any of the ideas that we want to bring up. Or the volunteer activities we have, they don't want to be a part of it."

And for many other teens at Siuslaw High School, volunteering just isn't that important.

"Maybe it's just a few handfuls of kids that are doing a bunch of different clubs and different activities," Audrey said. "And then everyone else just tries to get through high school."

"And there's nothing wrong with that," Wilkinson said.

Audrey agreed, saying, "I think it's good that not everyone volunteers. If everyone did volunteer, then it would just be really chaotic. There would just be so many people trying to do one thing that it would get competitive, and you would kind of lose that feeling of going to help someone. It would be more going because everyone else was doing it, and you want to look good."

"Some of the people that I appreciate in Key Club are the people who don't go out and volunteer, but are willing to give ideas for volunteering, and putting it in their mindset, and help with the planning,"

Wilkinson said. "Sometimes I'm bad at that. A lot of times I'm bad at that. So even that's helpful."

But the group also felt that volunteer organizations could be doing more to get teens involved.

"You should really publicize it," Audrey said. "There's a lot of events that go on, but you never hear about them."

"I feel like with how small town the town is, and how well everyone knows each other, if we actually start working with each other, doing events, and improving everyone's morale, then maybe we can improve our town as a whole."

— Nic Wilkinson, Siuslaw High School Senior

She suggested that groups contact the school, which can put "calls to action" into their daily announcements.

"Or we could put it on the boards that say what's happening around the community," she added. "Just make sure, when you say it, that you are welcoming and that you want them to be there. Make sure to emphasize, 'Hey, your existence in this activity would be really important to us.'"

And when groups do get teens involved, they should be nice.

"Giving the actual opportunity is really amazing, and it's greatly appreciated because we've all been able to grow because of it," Audrey said. "The only downside is when they treat you like children."

The group laughed in agreement.

"It's like, even though you're volunteering alongside them, it's almost as if they don't see our time as being as valuable as theirs," said Audrey. "Just treat us equals. We have brains. We came here to help, not to be degraded. Scoffing when we come in? Not appreciated."

Wilkinson nodded, saying, "We might be teenagers, but we have at least one brain cell. There are ones where they're like, 'Okay, you go do this now, and I'm going to go here.' I'm like, 'I understand how this works, thank you.'"

"That's happens a lot," Sam said. "The craziest thing for me is that it's usually not the person that is actually planning the event," Audrey explained. "It's usually other volunteers. The vibe that I get is that they're really proud of themselves for volunteering, and when they see younger kids, it kind of intimidates them, and makes them think that they're guilty."

Sam added, "And it's usually the people that volunteer at multiple places, and that's what they do — just volunteer."

"They put themselves on a throne," Wilkinson said. "It's just really weird," Audrey said. "It happens one or two times every time I volunteer, usually. But most of the people are really nice and they're really helpful, and they want to know all about you. You just make connections, and it's really fun."

Sometimes it is not just co-

workers that can be difficult, as tutor and former Boys and Girls Club volunteer Allison explained.

"I know a lot of the parents, they think their kids are always right. And I'm like, 'They're not,'" she said.

That got the group laughing again.

"I got yelled at a couple times by parents, and it re-

ally upset me," Allison continued. "I take everything to heart. Whenever people get mad at me, I get really upset. I think there's two sides to every story, so hear both of them before you get mad at somebody."

"Leave a legacy"

Everyone in the group had plans to leave the region once they graduate to attend college.

"We love this town, but..." Sam said.

"I was born and raised here, but I want to get out," finished Nic.

One of their plans to get comfortable in larger communities is to try out volunteering.

"I feel like there are so many more opportunities to volunteer in a big city," Audrey said. "You can volunteer anywhere and find something that you're interested in and find a place that does that. And you would be getting experience and you wouldn't have to pay to be there. Because I live in a small town, I feel like living in a city is going to be kind of sketchy. I want to make friends with the people who volunteer instead of the people who do nothing and watch TV all day."

To survive the terrors of the big city, stick with people you know.

"The city is kind of sketchy to me," Nic said. "There's a lot going on. The nice thing about this town is, not only is volunteering feels good to you, but a lot of people appreciate it. Because we're a smaller town, those sorts of things can get recognized. But in a bigger city, everything is so come-and-go, you barely know half the people who live there. That's weird for me to think about. I don't know if I would volunteer if I wouldn't even know the majority of the people there. I don't know what I would do or who I would help, or anything like that."

Was Nic scared of moving to a city?

"Kind of! Roseburg and Eugene are okay. But just the thought of even living in Portland scares me," he said. "The people, the traffic. It just scares me."

"I don't know if I would," said Allison. "When I started tutoring, I realized I like helping people and teaching

people stuff. So that kind of got me thinking that maybe I want to be a teacher, so that's helped me. I think that if you do volunteer, you can find what you're passionate about and what you want to do. So that's really helpful. But I feel like if I was in a bigger city, there would be a lot more stuff to do. If you have more stuff, like the mall or other things..."

Volunteerism wouldn't seem as important.

"Same," Nic said.

For Allison, "I'm used to a small town. I like the tight-knit community."

But that's not to say that everything in Florence is perfect.

"No construction!" Audrey said as everyone laughed.

The group wanted to see a new high school built and more community events.

"Or just more community involvement," Nic said.

"They have the musical festival they do, and the parades. But it would be nice to have more communitywide events, like something at the park," Audrey said. "A whole community grill-out. Just something for the community to wander around, make new friends."

"Or heck, just a tailgate party for the Superbowl," said Nic.

Sam agreed, saying, "That would actually be really cool."

"And definitely have more things during the winter for the whole community to do," Audrey added.

"Once the trees are dead, we're dead," Nic said.

But then he got philosophical.

"We have a lot of people in the community that just don't think about the community in general. We have a small amount of people who do whatever they can for the community, and everyone else is trying to pay their bills and not think about the community. I feel like with

how "small town" the town is, and how well everyone knows each other, if we actually start working with each other, doing events, and improving everyone's morale, then maybe we can improve our town as a whole."

Morale in the city, in their view, is on its way down in some ways.

"We have a lot of problems using a lot of things in ways they shouldn't be. And not being a part of the community and being bored. Just some toxic parts. And I feel like if we were more involved as a community, we might lessen that," he said.

For him, "toxic" meant drugs.

"There's a lot more of that going on. If everyone cared about each other more, we could really boost everyone's morale and support each other. It's getting kind of sketchy," he thought.

Most of the group didn't know if they would come back to Florence after college, as it was too far down the road.

"I'm planning on coming back," Allison said. "I'm third generation born here. I really like the town. There's a lot of nice people. But like Nick said, there's a lot more drugs going around."

While the city they leave behind may still have challenges, the group hoped that they have left some good as well.

"Just knowing that you're helping others. For me, I just like to see the people I help," Sam said. "Seeing a difference I make."

Come next school year, Allison will be the only one of the group left in town as she starts her junior year.

"You guys are like, great," she told the seniors. "I can tell there's such a difference around this school. You guys are going to leave a great legacy."

As for the people Allison will leave behind in two years, she said, "Put yourself out there. There's something for everybody. Everybody has something they're passionate about. If you can find a way to put that into volunteering, do it."

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