


Pitching in

for a different kind of Spring Break



Above and below right: SUU students pitch in with Habitat for Humanity in Torrance, California.

With windows bearing slogans like, “Viva la Mexico,” and “Mexico or bust,” four large, white vans pull out of the Southern Utah University Student Center parking lot on Saturday, March 11, 2005. Loaded with 54 students and several campus and community advisers, the vans are headed for a small town south of the border for spring break. While many students are spending spring break in similar, sunny locations, this group’s spring break was anything but typical. After an 18 hour van ride, the students unloaded in Guymas, Sonora, Mexico, ready for a week of building houses and playgrounds, cleaning graffiti off walls, working in a soup kitchen and helping out at an after-school club.

Hundreds of miles away, 10 of

their fellow students and two campus advisers arrived in Torrance, Calif., ready for a similar week of working on 16 houses with Habitat for Humanity. Both of these groups, as well as a third group that travels during the winter break in December, are part of SUU’s Alternative Break Club.

Alternative breaks began at SUU in 2000, a brainchild of then-student body president **Kristian Olsen** ('00, *Business Management*), with a group of less than a dozen students. The breaks have now grown to include nearly 100 students and several advisers from both campus and the Cedar City community. Aimed at providing an alternative to the traditional partying spring break, the alternative breaks prove to be life-

changing for the participants.

Mike Moon, one of the student presidents of the Mexico trip this past year, explains that many of the kids they work with at the after-school program, called Club Jerry, would be getting involved in drugs or other negative things if they didn’t have Club Jerry. Said Moon, “There’s a need in other countries, and I can help fill that need.” In addition to working at Club Jerry, Moon, along with co-president **Melissa Bradford**, led students in building a house for a woman and her children, who will now have electricity, stable windows and walls, and an outbuilding for a bathroom. When asked why he chose to participate in Alternative Spring Break, Moon explained that he wanted to develop his leadership skills and



Students Mike and Brianne Moon (behind) pose with a Mexican family whose home they helped build.

create lasting friendships.

“Alternative Spring Break is a way for students to come together in a way that I have never seen before. Friendships made through service are the ones that are the longest lasting,” said Moon. He goes on to add, “This is the number one experience that I have had at SUU. You go to school to learn. On the ASB trip I learned more about myself and others than I ever could have in a classroom.”

Toby Jackson, leader of a smaller group that worked on a house in Mexico during December, said he also had an amazing experience. He describes pulling into Impalpa, Mexico, in an SUU van with a trailer and having smiling, excited children pour out of their small houses to meet them because they hoped that, like the prior December, these students were delivering toys. They were not disappointed. Students were able to distribute more than 1,000 used, donated toys, as well as shoes and clothing.

Pam Branin, coordinator of Southern Utah University’s Service Learning Center, where the alternative break programs are administered, traveled with the group to Torrance in March.

Of her experience she says, “It was amazing to see students leave behind friends who had great spring break fun planned, and spend their break working each day until they were bone tired and loving it!”

Students who are involved in the alternative breaks don’t just perform service in other places. Branin explained that in order to attend one of the alternative breaks, students must participate in a local service activity each month. Additionally, students participate in fund raising activities to help keep the cost they pay to about \$250 each. “This really brings the groups closer together and helps them realize that there are many needs in our own community. They learn that they can make

an impact right here at home,” said Branin.

In addition to the groups that Branin works with, building construction students and health care students have done similar trips. With interest increasing every year, Branin hopes to continue to make more trips available not only during the longer winter and spring breaks, but also over long weekends and during the summer. “It speaks so highly of the students here that they are willing to do this. We need to continue to make these growing and learning opportunities available to more students,” says Branin.

Students and their campus and community advisers couldn’t agree more. A once graffiti-covered wall in Guymas, Mexico, perhaps says it best. A mural (*see front cover*) designed by SUU art student, Andrea Bulloch, and others, shows a child planting a seed, then depicts it further as it grows to a mature tree that provides fruit and shade and features the statement (in Spanish), “We serve together, We grow together.”

If you are interested in participating in or making a tax deductible donation to one of Southern Utah University’s alternative breaks, please contact Pam Branin in the Service and Learning Center, (435) 865-8335. **SU**

