

At cleanup, players part of a bigger team

Stephanie Weaver
Reading Eagle

As an Albright College criminology major, Zach Benjamin hears about inner-city life all the time in the classroom.

But the senior from Amity Township admits he hasn't spent too much time on the streets of Reading.

"I didn't know what it was like firsthand," the 21-year-old said. "We go to college. We don't live in the city."

Benjamin and his teammates from Albright's men's basketball team got a taste of city life last week during a team cleanup project in the Hudson Street area.

Decked out in red-and-white T-shirts, the Lions made quick work of an alley covered in trash and weeds. The impact was immediate: One young boy who walked past couldn't help but smile when he saw the team.

"Awesome," he whispered, as he looked down the alley.

Another local girl said she didn't think the alley would ever get cleaned because it was so bad.

"Sometimes in college you get into a rut and things get repetitive, so it's nice to come help out and maybe put a smile on someone's face," Benjamin said.

The project was coordinated by Reading Beautification Inc., a community-based nonprofit, as part of Mayor Vaughn D. Spencer's Partnership for a Cleaner City.

The partnership is an effort to have volunteers from local nonprofits, churches and businesses help to clean the city.

To date, said Reading Beautification Executive Director Nigel Walker, there have been 26,000 hours donated, helping the city save about \$300,000.

"It's so much more than just a cleanup that happens," Walker said. "You engage more with the people here."

Once he saw the Albright players hauling the bright orange trash bags near his home, Miguel Lugo quickly found a pair of gloves and got to work.

"I gotta help out," Lugo said, throwing a handful of debris into a trash bin. "It's in my neighborhood."

Head coach Rick Ferry hopes the service project will teach his players the importance of giving back.

"We want to do something that can impact our people or the people here that we're helping out," Ferry said. "I think there's a lot of momentum building right now in Reading and we want to be a part of that momentum."

The team ended up playing basketball with a group of about 20 kids after the cleanup and plans to go back to the neighborhood in a couple weeks.

"You look around and you see your teammates helping out," said 20-year-old Sam Marrella, a Wilson graduate from Sinking Spring. "We play basketball together, but we're also out here helping the community together."

Contact Stephanie Weaver: 610-371-5042 or sweaver@readingeagle.com



Reading Eagle: Tyler Sizemore
Tools in hand, the Albright College men's basketball team embarks on its cleanup project in downtown Reading.

Contact Stephanie Weaver, 810-371-5042 or sweaver@readingeagle.com.