

Spring breakers head to Jamaica--to work

Spring break for many college students means tan bodies, white sand, window clear water, jet skies, beer splattering and bumping and grinding -- all at your disposal. But some students from Castleton State College have opted for something more rewarding this spring break.

They will trade in their party shoes and help the young students of Jamaica and people of the community in which they are staying by mentoring children, helping with the restoration of the surrounding habitats and helping repair schools and homes.

"I remember a few years back we held a habitat trip meeting in Jeffords Auditorium and it was amazing how many students had shown up that day. What was even crazier was half of them bolting out the door once they had realized the trip was not intended for any drinking or partying," Jan Rouse, Castleton State College's Alternative Spring Break advisor, said while chuckling.

The trip is all business, but students may go on a few excursions of their own to explore different things the country has to offer, Rouse said.

The students will work as a group during the day and then break into groups of two or three staying with locals at night.

"The groups in which we will be working with ask for specific numbers. We do not want any waiting time. We just want to fit their needs for the short period of time that we are there. This is why our students must go through an application process and those who get selected must pay a small down payment of a yet to be determined amount," Rouse said.

The process is intense.

About 40 people applied for the chance to go to Jamaica, and only 14 were accepted. Each applicant was interviewed and thoroughly examined because of the responsibility involved, Rouse said.

"They are a panel and they rattle off questions at you questioning your integrity. It was really intimidating having four people trying to trick you," says Jill Bassett, a sophomore who was accepted for the trip. Castleton students are fund-raising to earn \$15,000 for the trip. This year they are raising money through events like a school dance and setting up recycling bins around campus in which all the bottle and can proceeds go straight to the trip's cost.

Students say raising that much money isn't easy.

"You have to be passionate about it, I mean, it is wicked hardcore. You think it is volunteer work and anyone can go, and it is not like that at all," Bassett said.

Despite the daunting figure, every year the fund-raising goal has been met and the group has even at times been able to use leftover money toward service projects once they got to their destination.

"The students going will help mentor and assist the children with whatever materials the child does not have and may need, such as purchasing new pencils or paper for them," said Chrispin White, a Castleton State College student activities advisor.

Students in previous years have gone to places like El Salvador and New Orleans to help. The objectives vary from year to year based on the needs of the area supervisor. Students in the past have rescued and medicated abandoned animals, built ditches for homes and schools and tried to educate the younger people in the communities.