

# COURIER-POST

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## Camden a magnet for volunteers



Nick Palladino, a student at Randolph-Macon College in Virginia, helps renovate a building at Urban Promise in Camden.

## College students visit to help improve city

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### CAMDEN

The staff at Urban Promise thanks the college students who spend spring break at the nonprofit's campus on the Camden-Pennsauken border with a barbecue under a banner that reads "I could have gone to Cancun, but God called to Camden instead."

The nonprofit has made good use of the banner this spring, when Urban Promise hosted more than 200 college students from 18 different schools.

"These are students that, perhaps a lot of their classmates are off to Cancun or Florida to unwind from their studies, but they choose to be here," said Jim Cummings, Urban Promise's work group director.

Camden is becoming a spring break destination for students who want to use the time off to help those less fortunate in a city known for a high crime rate and poverty.

"This little city of 80,000 people has a reputation that



Jim Cummings and Elise Washer of Urban Promise discuss college students helping out in Camden.

goes far and wide," Cummings said.

Last week, Urban Promise had a group of 16 students from two different colleges, the smallest groups of volunteers this spring.

"They come from all over the United States and Canada," Cummings said. The students spend their time helping maintain the Rudderow Street campus, which houses an elementary school, a high school and several programs after school that serve a combined 500 children.

"It's the only way that we can do what we do," Cummings said. "If we were to pay them, even at minimum wage, we're looking at thousands of dollars."

Those are dollars the nonprofit uses to run five after-school programs throughout the city.

"For me, it's really relevant to faith and what I believe in," said 24-year-old Jason Murray, the campus minister at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland,



AL SCHELL/Courier-Post  
Colby College students (from left) Sulaiman Nasser, Austin Southerlan and Daniel Adams help out at Urban Promise in Camden during spring break.

## Camden/Volunteers pitch in to help city

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Va.. "It's far more meaningful than going to the beach."

Murray and 20-year-old Nick Palladino, a student at the college, helped renovate the nonprofit Ray Scull Memorial Home, which will house offices and an art studio. They could have done the same type of work in Biloxi, Miss., helping to rebuild areas destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

"I chose to come here because the vision that Urban Promise has, I think, is very compelling," Murray said. "This is so different than what I've ever experienced in a city," added Palladino.

Some college volunteers returned after graduation to become part of the staff and others have taken the Urban Promise model to Delaware, Toronto, Vancouver, Honduras and Malawi.

Kent Monma, 17, a native of New Zealand and an international student at Colby

College in Waterville, Maine, traded traveling for volunteering.

"I thought the people of Camden needed me more than I needed to travel," Monma said. Kelly Conner, 18, spent time helping the teachers at Urban Promise's Camden Forward School.

The religion studies and Spanish major learned as much from the students as they learned from her.

"I'm really glad I came," the Randolph-Macon student said.

"I really had no idea what to expect," she said. "I'm from a small town and Camden is a neighborhood that I'm not used to. I've learned that good things can come from an area like Camden. These are wonderful kids, wonderful people. Camden is not such a bad place if there are people like this."

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