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Around the Columns

Community building

Paul “Teddy” Menke has called several places home. He grew up in Naperville, Ill.; helped his father build their family house in Berger, Mo., in 2004; and moved into an MU residence hall his freshman year in 2009.

Then, there’s Mary Jane Street in Columbia. Menke has never lived there, but during his sophomore year he helped build two of the neighborhood’s [Habitat for Humanity](#) homes, which sit across the street from each other.

The project started in fall 2010, when Menke, a peer adviser in Defoe-Graham, arranged a Habitat volunteer workday for the [Freshman Interest Group \(FIG\)](#) he advised. The students poured a concrete driveway, dug a path for a sidewalk and helped landscape the yard.

“My FIG was Social Justice Issues, so Habitat offered a good way to explore public housing,” he says. “At the end of the day, we were so tired, but who else can say they woke up at 9 a.m. and poured a driveway this morning. The students liked it, so I organized another to give more students a chance to help the Columbia community.”



Michael Leahy, a sophomore English major from Linn Creek, Mo., works with Melissa Ryder, a junior journalism major from Libertyville, Ill., to prepare a driveway for cement at a Habitat for Humanity site. Photo by Mary Fama

On the morning of April 30, more than a dozen Defoe-Graham residents gathered at the second job site. They supported the sides of the soon-to-be-poured driveway with dirt and created a slope in the backyard to assist with drainage. Their sweat and blisters didn't deter them from belting out radio hits and joking with Habitat supervisor Bob Shannon.

Ellen Huch, a sophomore human development and family studies major from St. Louis, admits that she struggled to wake up early on a Saturday but enjoyed the camaraderie — and learned some landscaping basics.

"I've definitely never done anything like this before," says Huch, while digging a narrow ditch near the driveway. "I mowed my mom's lawn once."

Shannon supervised the shoveling with an approving smile. "You guys have restored my faith in the younger generation," he told them. The students left with sore muscles and a renewed sense of community.

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