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A Philanthropic Spring Break for IWU Students

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – At 3:30 a.m. on March 14, 30 students and three members of the faculty and staff will embark on a week-long trip to provide disaster relief to a local community. These students are part of Illinois Wesleyan University's Alternative Spring Break (ASB), an organization created through the Student Volunteer Center to give students the opportunity for a non-traditional spring break vacation.

This year, through both ASB and the IWU/ISU chapter of Habitat for Humanity, over 90 students, accompanied by select members of faculty and staff, will volunteer their time and efforts. The members of ASB will travel to Galveston, and Crossville, Tenn., and the members of Habitat for Humanity will travel to Henderson, Texas.

In Galveston, ASB students will assist with the process of disaster relief, as the town is still recovering from Hurricane Ike. However, the 15 volunteers assigned to Crossville will focus on environmental cleanup, as well as restoring a local nature trail.

IWU Habitat for Humanity volunteers in Henderson will be pair with other Habitat for Humanity volunteers from all over the country as part of the alternative break program, Collegiate Challenge. This program supports making connections with their peers, while providing safe housing for those in need. The students spend eight to nine hours a day building houses and then will have the evenings off to relax and explore the surrounding areas of Henderson.

“The opportunity provides students the chance to take their classroom experiences and apply them to the real world in an enriching and meaningful way. The ultimate goal is that upon returning from ASB programs students will continue a life dedicated, at least in a small way, to service. It is amazing the positive impact that one week of service can have on an individual's life,” said Kevin Clark, director of the Student Volunteer Center.

This is the third year for Alternative Spring Break, and plans are already being made for the continuation of the program next year. Past trips have included providing disaster relief for

Hurricane Katrina victims in Pascagoula, Mississippi and New Orleans. Habitat for Humanity is a longstanding organization on the IWU campus, and throughout the years students have helped build hundreds of houses and participated in dozens of service trips. They have traveled to places such as Sumter, S.C., Miami, New Orleans and Colorado.

“Programs like these are important for IWU students because it gets them connected with a community. Students will also have an opportunity to see first-hand the fruit of their labor as they are able to interact with the people they are assisting,” said Clark.