

Weber State's nature volunteers work to make a difference

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JaNae Francis, Standard-Examiner Staff



OGDEN — Sometimes happiness is as simple as planting a tree.

That seemed to be the message Saturday morning as Weber State University students were joined by members of the community they invited to Make a Difference Day activities sponsored by the WSU Center for Community Engaged Learning.

More than 100 students and guests split up and gathered at the Ogden Nature Center, Antelope Island State Park and WSU's Community Garden to plant trees and other plants, post signs reminding people not to leave their cars idling and to help out in other ways.

The groups first met together and heard a talk by Cherise Udell, founder of Utah Moms for Clean Air, who told them about the sometimes dangerous state of Utah air and outlined ways that they could help to change that statistic.

"Can you imagine what the world would be like if more people were like that? If they got a good idea and just ran with it?," said Chelsea Wessman, a communications senior at WSU.

Wessman said she was happy to give of herself.

"I've been really blessed in my life," she said as she helped plant trees at Ogden Nature Center. "I think a lot of these students have as well."

Sara Purser, a senior studying fitness and nutrition, said she found helping at the center exciting and fun.

"I'm all about making the Earth better," she said. "I think it's so cool that Make a Difference Day is worldwide. Everyone around the whole world, we are all making a difference."

But there were challenges too.

"This is going to be an above-ground tree," said Travis Paulson, a WSU sophomore in radiology, as he struggled with a pick ax to dig a hole in hard, clay soil to plant a tree.

"I understand why Indians used clay for their pottery and stuff," said Trevor Wessman, who was helping Paulson.

Wessman, who is married to Chelsea Wessman, had struggled earlier with that same ax, trying to remove a big rock in the way of another tree he was helping to plant.

The WSU senior, studying human resource management and Latin American studies, said all of his efforts, while difficult, were worthwhile and would benefit himself and the community.

"If you are not investing the in the community, the community is not going to be invested in you or your career or your business," he said.

Paulson also said it is important and needed for more people to join together.

“Most people never become involved in the community,” he said. “In our grandparents’ time, people did more as a community.”

Shanna Franke, a WSU sophomore studying health science, said she believed she’d be a better employee someday as a result of her involvement.

Franke participated in the effort to log hours of volunteer service at the Ogden Nature Center.

She said she and members of her group in an interpersonal communications class all were required to complete 12 hours of service there.

Franke said she had just sent a text to a member of the class group reminding them to come to the center to help that day.

“I have had to learn to work with people’s schedules,” she said of the effort to get everyone to do their volunteer work before Nov. 7 when they present in class.

She said she didn’t believe she would have learned the course’s objective as well had she just studied the concept in books and on paper.

“I think if you do hands-on things like this, it’s easier to learn how to communicate in groups. This will also be helpful in the workplace,” she said.

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