

Abigail Rossiter

Newspaper Article and Photos

Alternative Spring Break

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Student volunteers help bring order to nature trail

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Student volunteers help bring order to nature trail

By Laura McKenzie

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In January 2017, a tornado ripped through Barnwell State Park, creating a helter-skelter nature trail of its own with downed trees and twisted bushes. Soon the Fern Hill Nature Trail is set to reopen through the efforts of some college students from Virginia and park employees.

Six female students and their chaperone from Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Va. joined forces with the park staff to clear away debris from the 1.5-mile trail that has been closed since the tornado.

Armed with limb loppers, pruning shears and rakes, the girls worked for two days at the park. "We got on the backhoes and used the chain saws," said Park Manager Eddie Richburg. "They came behind us and cleared the debris away."

"I was surprised at how much that we got done," said Richburg. "Once we got in there, we found it wasn't as bad as we feared." Still, there was a lot to be done to get it ready to reopen for public use.

He said the student-volunteers "gave us the opportunity to focus on the nature trail. Before now, we had too many other projects to handle."

Now sunlight filters through the standing trees and leaves crunch beneath the feet of hikers, unimpeded by limbs and debris.

The trail is now "well marked," said Richburg, with signs and trees marked with bright orange paint. It is expected to be opened to the public within the next week.

The Old Dominion team is comprised of students who volunteer to spend their spring break working in the Blackville area on a variety of community services projects coordinated by the Blackville Community Development Corporation.



← HIDE CAPTION

Working on the Fern Hill Nature Trail at Barnwell State Park are Old Dominion University students (left to right) Abigail Roessler, JaCinta Ball, Jacara Wright, Emily Wright, and Kayla Walker. Not pictured are Maelynn Stepp and Susan Craig. [Laura J. McKenzie / Publisher]

This is an annual project between the Blackville CDC and various colleges.

This year's team included Abigail "Abby" Rossiter, 20, of Carrollton, Va. (team leader); Emily Wright, 19, of Linden, Va.; Kayla Walker, 20, of Richmond, Va.; Jacara Wright, 19, of Chesterfield, Va.; JaCinta Ball, 21, of Kinsale, Va.; Maelynn Steppe, 20, of Richmond, Va.; and Susan Craig of Norfolk, Va., who served as chaperone.

"This has been such a welcoming town," said Rossiter of the Blackville community. The girls visited local restaurants and met with students at Macedonia Elementary School.

Not only did the students help out at the state park, they also painted fire hydrants, worked on playground equipment at Macedonia Elementary and installed grout at the Axis 1 Center in Barnwell.

For each, it was a learning experience that got them out of their normal routine.

"I like giving back to the community," said Ball.

"I liked painting the fire hydrants," said Wright. "It really brightened up the town. I was nice to see what a difference something like that makes."

All said they now have more respect for small towns and for living in the country. In the meantime, the students, who didn't know each other several weeks ago, have become friends.

Their advice for Blackville residents? "Don't change. This is a great town. You are like a well-knit family," they said.

Photos















