Niagara University’s president, the Rev. Joseph L. Levesque, C.M., has focused on community engagement since his inauguration in January of 2000. To advance this concern, he has worked with several campus-wide groups, including a committee on community revitalization. These efforts have built upon already-existing structures that have been in place since 1965. That year, the university established the Niagara University Community Action Program (NUCAP) to direct the involvement of Niagara’s students in community-service projects. In 1994, a grant from the Corporation for National Service enabled the university to expand community-service efforts by establishing the Learn and Serve Niagara program.

The Corporation for National and Community Service honored Niagara University with a place on the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll With Distinction for exemplary service efforts and service to the community. Niagara was among nine colleges and universities in New York state named as Honor Roll With Distinction members. In all, 83 institutions nationwide were named as Honor Roll With Distinction members.

Launched in 2006, the Community Service Honor Roll is the highest federal recognition a school can achieve for its commitment to service-learning and civic engagement. Honorees for the award were chosen based on a series of selection factors, including scope and innovation of service projects, percentage of student participation in service activities, incentives for service, and the extent to which the school offers academic service-learning courses. Niagara, which maintains active service-learning and volunteer programs for students, has been on the Honor Roll since it was first launched. An estimated 2,000 students provide approximately 60,000 hours of service annually as tutors in local schools districts and as interns and volunteers in more than 40 social service agencies and organizations in Western New York and southern Ontario. NU also operates ReNU Niagara, a Community Outreach Partnership Center that coordinates programs in Niagara Falls. Niagara’s four colleges also operate centers that provide research, training, and professional and educational services for business and industry, school districts, and families.

NU was among 119 colleges and universities nationwide, and six in New York, selected for the Community Engagement Classification of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. NU was cited in both categories considered by the foundation: curricular engagement and community outreach and partnerships.

One outstanding project is done by accounting students. For many years, accounting students in NU’s College of Business Administration have provided free income-tax assistance to elderly and low-income residents of the community. Last year, NU’s Lambda Chi chapter of Beta Alpha Psi received the top award for preparing the most tax returns in the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program at the national organization's meeting in Anaheim, Calif. The award, presented annually by the Internal Revenue Service, was one of only eight awards given nationally. The presentation marked the second time Niagara University students have been recognized for their participation in the VITA program, having received two awards in 2006—one for the most tax returns prepared and another for the largest amount of money refunded to taxpayers in the local community. "The VITA award exemplifies Niagara University's commitment to community service in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul,” said Al Oddo, professor of accounting at Niagara. "Our students prepared more than 700 tax returns and provided over $500,000 in federal tax refunds to low-income and elderly taxpayers in our community." Beta Alpha Psi, founded in 1919, is an honorary organization for accounting, finance and information systems students and professionals. Its primary objective is to encourage and give recognition to scholastic and professional excellence in the financial information field. In the spring 2009 semester, Niagara University students prepared tax returns at two sites, Niagara University and at the Community Outreach Partnership Center office, which is located in a low-income area of the city of Niagara Falls. NU students have been involved in the tax preparation program since 1992. The tax preparation is conducted during the spring semester of each academic year.
Thursday, June 18th dawned cloudy, cold, windy and rainy. Not exactly the best conditions to send 95 volunteers out for the annual day of service, but they came to 4th Floor Vinnie’s full of energy, laughter, enthusiasm and passion to do good. They worked inside and outside in the steady drizzle and drenching rain. They scraped, painted, stained, gardened, sorted canned goods, stocked food pantries and unloaded trucks, they reorganized shelves and cleaned out rooms and cleaned (like toothbrush cleaning) tables, chairs, walls and window sills, they walked in the rain doing home inspections and blew up balloons for a pre-school graduation. They shredded legal documents, escorted patients, read with 1st graders, played bingo with the elderly, cut trails in the woods and sorted through old books. They filed, did data entry and shoveled dirt. They came back to Vinnie’s 4th floor tired, proud of what they had done, encouraged by those they had met at their agencies.

Echoing the words of Vincent de Paul and Fr. Levesque, they were thinking and talking about the “MORE” that they could do.

SINCERE THANKS TO ALL
Through our participation with the Catholic Health System’s CHAMP Program Task Force, Learn & Serve arranged for a “Meet the Athletes” event for the students in grades six through eight at North Tonawanda Catholic School. NU athletes from women’s hockey and men’s baseball gave presentations on fitness, nutrition, study habits, etc. before working on skill-building exercises with small groups of students. Our athletes discussed the strategies they use to effectively integrate sports and academics. They also brought various training equipment to the school which provided enjoyable hands-on activities for these young students.
Now, students can access Service Learning information on the internet. Students can apply for Education placements, sign up for NUCAP events, and apply for transportation all online. Please feel free to check out our website!

Homepage: www.niagara.edu/learnserve
To Apply for an Education placement: www.niagara.edu/learnserve/tutor_placement.htm
To view and sign up for a NUCAP event: www.niagara.edu/learnserve/nucap.htm
For info on how to get your Service Learning placement: www.niagara.edu/learnserve/howtogetstarted.htm
To sign up for transportation once you have a placement: www.niagara.edu/learnserve/transportation_agreement.htm
Learn and Serve Niagara contact page: www.niagara.edu/learnserve/contact_l&s_staff.htm

Feel Free to Contact A Member of the Learn and Serve Office!

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“SERVICE LEARNING — PERFORMING SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF OTHERS”