



Lauren Ringger, a journalism major at Grand Valley State University, paints recycled trimming for the Habitat home.

Photos by DANA EDWARDS/Special to the Democrat

## College students help Habitat for Humanity on spring break

By Dana Edwards

SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

Nailing wooden house frames and digging holes for shrubbery are some of the tasks Philip Miller, a junior from Grand Valley State University in Michigan, accomplished during his spring break in Tallahassee.

The psychology and non-profit administration major traveled more than 1,000 miles with 17 fellow campus ministry students to build Habitat for Humanity homes in Tallahassee's Mabry Oaks neighborhood.

About 50 students from Grand Valley State University, Murray State University in Kentucky and Indiana State University are participating in Tallahassee's Collegiate Challenge, which started March 6 and ends Friday.

The Habitat for Humanity program allows students to spend their vacations building homes. The students are staying in cabins on the Florida State University Reservation.

"Most of the time, students take traditional spring break vacations some place fun," said Tyler Turkle, executive director of Big Bend Habitat for Humanity. "Here, we give them a chance to help others while still having fun."



Skip Sawyer, left, a full-time Habitat employee, and Gerald Miller, the Grand Valley State University chaperone, build a birthday cake shack to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Florida State University's Habitat for Humanity chapter. Each year, the chapter hosts a Semihole Shack Showdown, an awareness event designed to advocate, educate and fundraise for Habitat for Humanity.

Nationwide, more than 12,000 students will travel to 200 locations during spring break to build houses. Collegiate Challenge also has a summer program from April 10 through Aug. 27 at sites throughout the country.

Habitat for Humanity homes are sold to families with no-interest mortgages. Among other qualifications, recipients must participate in a rigorous application process, and they must invest

sweat-equity hours in building their home and the homes of others.

"Through the Habitat for Humanity projects I've learned to have a selfless attitude and have fun while serving," said Miller, a returning Collegiate Challenge participant. "We are building an environment where we also teach."

Several of the students have worked in Tallahassee before.

"This is my third time

**FOR MORE INFO**  
<http://www.habitat.org/youthprograms>

here, and I love it," said Kelly Koenigskecht, a fifth-year health professions major at Grand Valley. "It's an awesome experience, and I would love to come back again next year, possibly as an adult supervisor."

Habitat homes are environmentally-friendly. Big Bend area homes follow Florida Green Building standards and become Energy Star qualified.

"It's really important that Habitat houses meet green standards; they become real assets to the community," said William Stone, construction site manager. "Volunteers like these college students have the time to build better homes that also have beneficial impacts on the environment and local communities."

**Editor's note:** This story was written by another student working during spring break. Dana Edwards, a freshman at the University of Florida, is majoring in history and journalism. She graduated from Lawton Chiles High School and participated in the Tallahassee Democrat's Teen Democrat program for high school journalists.

## Students to perform '13, the Musical' in Tampa

By Ashley Ames  
DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

The drama students at Leon High School are going back to middle school.

But this time around, they'll be singing, dancing and acting their way through puberty in the "13, the Musical," a performance that puts a new spin on being a teen. It also landed them a coveted Mainstage performance at the Florida State Thespi-an Festival in Tampa, taking place this week.

"13" focuses on the turmoil of growing up through the eyes of the character Evan, who's trying to handle a move to a new city, a bar mitzvah and his parent's divorce. The show had a brief run on Broadway in late 2008, but has been a great success for the Leon students, who breathed new life into the production.

The show is one of eight selected out of 40 submitted performances from around the state, and the cast and crew could not be more excited, especially Rod Durham, Leon drama teacher and producer of "13." It's the first time since 1996 that a play from a Leon County school has been selected.

"I don't know if there's a bigger deal in what I do for a living than this," Durham said. "I'm just so proud of this program, and the amazing work these kids do."

The cast and crew of 36 will make their way down to Blake High School in Tampa on Thursday, and

See MUSICAL, PAGE 2, LOCAL