



JULIE KNIGHT

Cultivating Community

By James Shields '00
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Guilford College has an enduring tradition of service to the wider community. Quaker ideals of peace, justice and community-building continue to be the foundation for our efforts to serve and learn. The Bonner Center of Community Learning was named with these noble ideals in mind.

Many colleges and universities perform tremendous service to their communities, but these efforts could often be seen as charity more so than service. Philosopher John Dewey noted that charitable efforts often result in one class "achieving merit by doing things gratuitously for an inferior class." It is this patronizing approach to service that the Bonner Center for Community Learning

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seeks to avoid. Community learning implies to us a vital partnership with all members of our community. We want students, faculty and staff to break through the imaginary bubble that is our campus and not only engage the community but become an integral part of it. The word "community" is rooted in the Latin word, *communis*, meaning "shared by all or many." Through community service, our students share in the challenges, accomplishments and aspirations of the community. They work and serve as stakeholders in the greater community, creating lasting partnerships.

Kristi Matthews '06 started her relationship with Greensboro's Montagnard community before she became a Guilford student. Working with her sister, **Kenyona "Sunny" Matthews '04**, **Jackie Gaskill '03** and others, she developed a greater understanding of the challenges facing immigrants and refugees in Greensboro. Our students developed a summer camp for children based on the needs of the Montagnard community. Now in its fourth year, the summer

camp will also serve African and Latino immigrants and refugees who have moved to the area. This program is a prime example of how the Bonner Center for Community Learning adapts to the needs of the community through consistent involvement with those we serve.

The opportunities to serve at Guilford are diverse and designed to appeal to all students, regardless of their academic discipline or level of passion for a particular issue. From serving at Guilford Correctional Center in McLeansville, N.C., to educating the community about AIDS and HIV, Guilford students are making an incredible impact on the greater community. Community members in turn are serving as teachers and mentors for our future leaders. Faculty, staff and students come together in an academic cycle that moves them from personal concern to problem identification and action and reflection.

Conscious and meaningful community and service learning for Guilford students, faculty and staff is crucial if we are to create an academic environment "emphasizing the creative problem-solving skills, experience, enthusiasm, and international perspectives necessary to promote positive change in the world," as our long-range strategic plan states.

"We need to cultivate an engaged youth to provide results both for students and the community," said Wayne Meisel, president of the Bonner Foundation. "This will also insure a future generation of thoughtful, sensitive and active citizens and leaders. This is the essential ingredient both to our form of government and our health as a society."

As we begin to implement Guilford's strategic plan, *Creative Leadership for the 21st Century*, it is encouraging to note that community and experiential learning will be enhanced and expanded to all facets of the college. Through initiatives such as "The Guilford Challenge" and principled problem-solving, we will develop a new generation of well-educated students who are motivated and prepared to meet future challenges.