Since 1993 the Service-Learning Center has awarded a faculty member the Michigan Campus Compact Community Service-Learning Award for Teaching to someone from Calvin’s faculty who has contributed to the development of their students’ commitment to civic engagement through service-learning. This year’s award recipient was Gail Landheer Zandee, who has been teaching in the Calvin College Nursing program for many years. In addition to her professorial duties, she has in the past received two grants to fund her work in health promotion, illness prevention, and community partnership in the Creston neighborhood, and has also served as a volunteer consultant for God’s Kitchen. Her publications explore collaborative techniques such as “reciprocity and partnership” and “listening to community voices,” and she has given many presentations on community-based research, service-learning, and educational partnerships in communities. Currently, Gail holds the unique position of Community Partnership Coordinator for the Nursing program. In this position, Gail has led Calvin Nursing faculty into deep and unique departmental partnerships with health care communities in three Grand Rapids neighborhoods: Creston-Belknap, Madison-Baxter, and Garfield Park. As the Nursing program has developed its own identity as a community-based program, Zandee has been an instrumental connector of college to community, as well as an expert in community-based research. Her most unique contribution to the college’s engagement efforts has been her leadership in the community health workers program. Through this program, which has been funded through a variety of grant opportunities and internal partnerships at the college, Zandee has recruited, trained, and paid lay community members from each of the three neighborhoods. Once trained, the community health workers serve as voices of experience, and cultural translators for teams of nursing students in their community-based research projects involving health care consultation and delivery directly to families in their homes during the nursing students’ junior and senior years of study. An innovative model of service-learning at its best, this program was suggested by community residents and developed with the educational needs of nursing majors in mind. The Service-Learning Center is proud to partner with engaged professors like Gail, and we commend her passion for both community service-learning opportunities, and deep and meaningful community development partnerships.
You Say Goodbye, I Say Hello...

It is with sadness that we announce the departure of Lori Gesink from the role of Associate Director in the Service-Learning Center. At the beginning of June, Lori will assume a leadership role at Eastern Hills Community Church in Denver, Colorado. Lori leaves after six years of building partnerships both locally and nationally—we will miss her. Congratulations to Lori on this new opportunity!

You can still contact the Service-Learning Center at 526-6455, or email us at slc@calvin.edu. In light of Lori’s departure, we are planning to initiate a series of feedback sessions in the summer and fall from our community partners designed to help us re-envision the ways our office serves the Grand Rapids community. If you are interested in participating in such a process, please contact us at the number or email address provided.

(Re)visioning the City

As Wendell Berry would put it, we set out to “practice resurrection.” This was the call to action from the opening (re)vision day session, led by Calvin staff members Gail and Ken Heffner. There was a tone of hope in the room as the Heffners sent us to renew our city. There was a lot of expectation. Yes, some students were bleary eyed and sleepy on that Saturday morning, but the ones who were listening heard a radical message: we could restore our broken relationships to our community through our stalwart energy, food, and clothing consumption.

(Re)vision, a Saturday event put on by the RA staff of Calvin’s residence hall Bolt-Heyns Timmer, was an opportunity for over 100 Calvin students to explore Grand Rapids and consider their connection to this city. Students rode the bus or biked in small groups to organizations around the city that addressed issues of environmental sustainability, local food production, and clothing production. Constantly asking the question, “how can we (re)vision our community and our responsibility to care for it?”, students took heart from visiting excellent examples of organizations like the Grand Rapids Art Museum, Heartside Ministry and Marie Catrib’s. Perhaps the best example of (re)vision in practice happened as students fashioned tote bags using found objects such as oranges, bubble wrap, and old keys. Students applied paint to these items and pressed them onto tote bags in much the same way that one would press a stamp onto paper. In this way, old discarded objects made something beautiful.

Here, through their art, students demonstrated our Christian calling: to re-imagine the possibility of something old and broken.

Throughout the day, our actions were not neutral—we invested in our local community, becoming better equipped to respond to the brokenness in this place and to (re)vision a change. Really, we were actualizing our liberal arts education. Aristotle writes about meaningful education necessarily informing our virtues, or good habits. As our good habits become second nature, we are able to contribute to the common good of our communities. Our perspective is expanded to include our neighbors. So while it was simple to hop onto a bus and visit Phil’s Stuff, Wealthy Street Bakery, or Clothing Matters, restoring our city was life-giving. One month after the event, one student relates, “(Re)vision day helped me realize responsible living is doing the same things you do every day, but switching to a mindset that looks outside of yourself.”

(Re)vision challenged students to take agency of their actions, to recognize that small decisions can hurt surrounding communities. Yet, this challenge was clothed in hope as students connected to their place of Grand Rapids, witnessing brokenness while practicing restoration through simple actions. It was a day of resurrection.
Gearing Up for StreetFest 2008

By Kelly De Vries, administrative support

As the school year is coming to a close, the Service-Learning Center is just getting revved up for the summer, to plan the annual fall StreetFest event. This year, we have hired two current employees, Rebecca Garofano and Becca Timmermans to fulfill the StreetFest Coordinator and Office Assistant positions, respectively. Rebecca Garofano, a sophomore, began her work at the SLC this past February as ABSL Coordinator for the Natural Sciences. Her interests include pursuing social justice, living in an equitable manner, and artistic endeavors such as sewing and button making. Rebecca is excited about this opportunity to introduce first year students to two aspects of life she loves: service-learning and Grand Rapids. Becca Timmermans, a sophomore as well, began working as a driver at the SLC during her first year at Calvin. This year, she has filled the positions of Transportation Coordinator and ABSL Coordinator for the Social Sciences. In her spare time Becca enjoys exploring issues of race and gender equity, playing WordTwist, and being with her friends. Chris VanZanen, our administrative assistant, is a bit concerned about keeping Rebecca and Becca apart, particularly because they look alike and have similar names, mannerisms and ideals. And if, by chance, you see the signature (re//)becca, you have encountered the work of the Rebecca and Becca super summer Service-Learning team!

If you would like to participate in StreetFest 2008, go to: http://www.calvin.edu/admin/slc/street_fest/sf_agency_form.htm

Book Review: The Irresistible Revolution

By Amy Jonason, partnerships coordinator

When Shane Claiborne prays “Thy kingdom come,” he prays for social upheaval of the most profound kind. But rather than being fueled by government policies or the fervor of angry activists, this upheaval will happen at the dinner table and the park down the street, invigorated at the grassroots by Christian love and relationship. Claiborne’s book The Irresistible Revolution compellingly and insistently sets forth a new vision for people of faith, largely by telling the story of the author’s own conversion to the status of “ordinary radical.” Growing up in the Bible Belt of East Tennessee, Claiborne was an enthusiastic evangelist of white, middle-class stripes, handing out tracts at the local mall and rocking out to contemporary Christian music—until a friend at college invited him to hang out with the homeless in downtown Philadelphia, introducing him to a world in which he realized the compassion and suffering of Christ like never before. As Claiborne tells it, this marked the beginning of his transition from prom king to dreadlocked disciple of a Jesus whom many believers no longer recognize.

His stories gently skewer suburban American Christianity for its complacency and its acquiescence to the individualistic, consumer-driven ideologies of contemporary culture. After their college days, Claiborne and some close friends started The Simple Way, an intentional Christian community in a Philadelphia neighborhood. The rest of the book sets forth the vision that Claiborne and his community have for a new (though ancient) way of being the church. “The great tragedy in the church is not that rich Christians do not care about the poor but that rich Christians do not know the poor,” he writes. Aggressive nonviolence, intentionality and small acts of great love are the ingredients of this revolution. The model is derived from the practices of the early church of Acts and embraces countercultural principles like a common financial purse. Whether they are juggling fire torches to distract attention from neighborhood fights or raining thousands of dollars’ worth of coins onto Wall Street in a makeshift “Year of Jubilee,” Claiborne and his cohorts seek to proclaim a gospel of love and liberation to the rich and poor alike in one American city. The Irresistible Revolution convincingly invites Christians everywhere to do the same where they live.

“The great tragedy in the church is not that rich Christians do not care about the poor but that rich Christians do not know the poor.”

By Amy Jonason, partnerships coordinator
This spring break, the Service-Learning Center sent 8 student groups to:

Knoxville, TN
Rehoboth, NM
Kansas City, MO
Houma, LA (2 trips)
Boston, MA
Boothville, LA
Pittsburgh, PA
Taking a Risk

By Elise Ditta, spring break trip coordinator

Reflections on the Dangers of Spring Break Trips

Upon hearing that I was the Spring Break coordinator for the Service-Learning Center, I must admit that I groaned inwardly. I have serious reservations about service-learning spring break trips, because I think that their short-term nature often allows for students to thoughtlessly damage a partnership with an agency, while only reinforcing stereotypes that students hold. Even as I prepared for my own trip to Knoxville, Tennessee, I had questions about the purposes of the trips. Although all my questions have not been answered, I think that the trip I took to Knoxville has given me a better idea of why the Service-Learning Center supports the spring break trips. I have realized that the trips are important because they facilitate relationships between Calvin students, reflection in Calvin students and partnerships between Calvin and agencies around the country.

My group left for Knoxville early Saturday morning and arrived late over the day. This trip would have been emotionally impossible if it were not for the reflection we had about the girls at the agency, the agency itself and the reasons the girls were at the agency. My hope is that all trips are this way—stretching students enough to require reflection in order to get through the week. The service-learning spring break trips also create partnerships with nonprofits around the country. Many of the spring break locations are ones that Calvin students return to year after year, including Boston, Houma, Knoxville, Rehoboth and Kansas City. FCA has a ‘wall of fame’ containing pictures of all the Calvin groups that have come there. It was encouraging to look at this wall, and see that although our trip may only be for a week, the Service-Learning Center’s partnership with the agency is twelve years long.

Although all my questions and concerns about spring break trips have not been answered, by going on a trip and hearing the stories from the seven other trips, I have found that even when trips are not perfect, they facilitate relationships, reflection and partnership. As a student from the Knoxville trip wrote, “This trip really challenged me and pushed me to think about who I was serving and what I could continue to do and learn from them even after coming back to Calvin”. It is exciting to see service-learning trips nudge students towards thoughtful service and learning.

Lunch with Miss Lena

By Brent Sloterbeek, spring break trip leader

During spring break, I led a service-learning trip to Houma, LA (about an hour south of New Orleans). Service-learning trips place emphasis on cultural learning as well as relationship building. We were not only there to work on homes, but also to meet with people, listen to their stories, and learn from their experiences. I spent the majority of my time painting the exterior of Miss Lena’s house. While working there, I enjoyed two delicious southern lunches prepared by Miss Lena. She does this for each group that works at her house! It was a great experience to work and stay on the bayous of southern Louisiana watching (and smelling) the shrimp boats all day and night. I also had the experience of meeting with the chief of the Houma Nation Indians who are a Louisiana state recognized tribe, but are not federally recognized. They are currently working on getting federal recognition, but are struggling to meet all the criteria the government places on tribes because they are spread out all over southern Louisiana. The residents of southern Louisiana are also dealing with the loss of their land due to erosion. Every half an hour, a piece of land the size of a football field disappears from southern Louisiana. This is creating struggles for them as they are forced to decide whether to continue living where they grew up and their family live, or to move to higher ground. For those like Miss Lena who grew up across the street from the house she is currently in, it is very difficult for her to think about moving away. During the week in Louisiana, I was able to bond with the other students I traveled with, learn much more about Louisiana culture (and eat lots of shrimp!), and help people in their recovery from Hurricane Rita.
Calvin Grad Publishes Article on Service-Learning

Aaron Einfeld, alumnus and current staff member of Calvin College, recently published an article on service-learning. Appearing in the Journal of College Student Development, Einfeld’s article, “The Relationships Between Service-Learning, Social Justice, Multicultural Competence, and Civic Engagement,” reports the findings of his qualitative research done with students involved in service-learning. In the article, Einfeld not only explores the role service-learning plays in cultivating multicultural competence, civic engagement, and commitment to social justice but also offers helpful suggestions as to how educators can employ service-learning models that more effectively orient students toward social justice and empower students for social change. After graduating from Calvin College in 2005, Einfeld pursued his interests in student development at Indiana State University, receiving a Masters of Science in their Student Affairs in Higher Education program. Aaron currently works at Calvin as the resident director of Noorderweir-Vanderwerp residence hall. An asset to our office, Einfeld has partnered extensively with the Service-Learning Center through his involvement in our spring break trip and residence hall community partnership programs.

CEAP in its 11th Year

On May 1st, a group of Calvin’s faculty, students, and community members came together in the basement of the Science Building for the bi-annual gathering of Calvin’s Environmental Assessment Program (CEAP). Mathew Sleeth, author of Serve God, Save the Planet as well as an environmental advocate and former emergency room physician, told the story of his family’s faith journey and how it relates to the reduction of their energy use. The discussion was both thoughtful and informative. Following the presentation, students displayed projects from the semester that dealt with issues such as light pollution, water quality, and cloud coverage. CEAP is a program that encourages collaborative effort from Calvin’s faculty and students to develop an understanding of our local ecosystem. Class time and lab sessions are used for projects that focus on environmental issues. The goal? It is to use this data as a basis for recommended change in Calvin College, local municipalities and individual behavior. It is through CEAP that we can explore and embrace the goodness of God’s creation. Former coordinator Dieter Bouma explains, “As we learn new things about it, we also learn how to care for it better, and (hopefully) become closer with it.” CEAP is a critical asset to the service-learning model. It began with the realization that very few natural science courses involved service-learning. Since its inception, CEAP has dramatically increased faculty and students’ opportunities to be involved in service-learning. It benefits students within these disciplines by providing the chance to partner with faculty, an opportunity to understand one perspective of social change. CEAP further provides valuable guidance for individuals outside the natural sciences. Calvin benefits from the information it provides, which in turn empowers students and professors of all disciplines to bring about change. The program is a reminder to the entire Calvin community of the small bit of ground God has given to it and it needs to be utilized in planning, grounds-keeping, and curriculum decisions. More recently, the program has begun to extend beyond the immediate campus with this year marking the beginnings of a new partnership. The May 1st event was fortunate to have Calvin Christian Middle School provide a poster about water quality research. CEAP is a model program in how it seeks to understand the responsibility of research in addressing environmental issues. It is, as founding member Janel Curry explains, an excellent model of how expertise can be a form of service, “integrated into a whole.”
Telling Our Stories: Coupling Narrative with Service-Learning

This interview was conducted as a follow-up to a service-learning experience put together by the Baxter Community Center and Dr. Stephanie Sandberg, professor of communications and theater. Students from Sandberg’s “Performance Studies” class partnered with residents from the Baxter neighborhood, heard their stories, and then performed these oral histories for the community center’s 2007 Christmas Open House Fundraiser.

S-LC: Why did you originally put this project together?

Sandberg: I originally met with Melanie Beelen at the Baxter Community Center to brainstorm with her about a project where we could use students who were involved in performance studies to do an oral history. I thought it’d be good for my students because it combined service, academic study, personal narrative, performance, and so many other skills into one experience.

Although the people who were interviewed were a little hesitant at first, they found that telling their story in relation to what they do and who they are is an empowering experience. The students, meanwhile, learned that the stories that are accessible to us are often the stories of people who self-present their stories. What about all those people who are not presenting themselves to tell their stories? Their stories are just as important. You have to encourage them to tell their stories, because their stories are certainly as important to the history of the community center as are others.

S-LC: How do you see narrative as empowering?

Sandberg: Well, if you think about the stories that are told in culture, you tend to have the same stories told over and over again, the same story structures, the same formulas in the story. There are certain formulas that a culture links onto and attaches itself to. Now is that because the story is true, or because the stories are told over and over again? That’s the question. When we encounter that particular formula of romantic comedy that we find in films and television, do we like that formula because it’s true, or because it is told so many times? I think that it is probably a mixture, but what happens is that there are a tremendous number of people excluded from that story because it’s not true for them. I really don’t think that white, American romantic comedy (and that is a particular genre, although we don’t call it white, American romantic comedy) is representative of everyone’s experience. I really doubt that if I go to a predominantly African American high school and start interviewing girls about their experiences with romance that it would match up with a film like How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days.

Why are we not telling those stories about what’s happening? If your story is not being told, what does that do to you? That’s why I think narrative is empowering. If you get a chance to tell your story, or to have your story told, whether that’s in an oral history project or a play that gets written, there’s an empowerment to that being heard and voiced. It’s a whole other way of looking at things. It makes us recognize that a person’s words are sacred and important.

S-LC: As a professor of theater, why do you think that theater is an appropriate arena for service-learning and social justice?

Sandberg: One of the best things that theater does is produce dialogue. The reason that it produces dialogue in a different way than film, poetry, sculpture, etc., is because it is experienced communally. And it’s experienced in a much more interpersonal manner, because you don’t have any medium between you and the audience. It’s right there; it’s raw, human-to-human communication. Because of that rawness, it involves the entire community. A lot of energy is generated in the live-ness of it. There’s a communal experience between all the various audience members and the performers. So what happens is, you’re having communication with the person next to you, with the person in front of you, etc. That sets up a live, breeding ground for discussion, because discussion is also intricately and intimately interpersonal. If you’re going to build dialogue and discussion, having an interpersonal experience to start with, an encounter to begin with, is a great way to do it.

There is so much dialogue and energy coming out of the art. The question is, how do you sustain that—that interpersonal energy, where people can experience something together, and now they can sit down together and talk about that experience. How do you continue to build the dialogue? How do you sustain the energy once you’ve created a piece? That’s what I continue to think about.
The S-LC Enters the Blogosphere

By Katy Chadwick, ABSL coordinator

Justice, shalom, service-learning, higher education, and community engagement are all words that come up often in the many discussions among Service-Learning Center staff members. Working in the S-LC provides many opportunities to learn about and struggle with all of these topics and the issues that go along with them. We appreciate these discussions as we are exposed to many different opinions and new information that helps us all to grow. Because of these experiences, we have decided to start an online blog that will be available for anyone to read and comment on. In this way, we hope not only that our staff will grow by hearing the opinions of a more diverse group of people, but also that we can expand the discussion to help facilitate awareness and growth in a wider community of readers. We also see this blog as a way to stick to our commitment to be agitators at Calvin and in the greater community. Hopefully, we will get a variety of readers and participants ranging from those who are hearing about these issues for the first time to those who have been struggling with these same things for years. So far, topics addressed in the blog have included challenging Calvin’s environmental sustainability, developing a mission statement for the Service-Learning Center, discussing the ways in which we are shaped by our communities, exploring the connection between art and social justice, and much more. We are continually expanding the conversations and discussions that occur on the blog and would love to receive input and opinions from an ever-increasing audience of readers.

To read or participate in the discussion, go online to http://servicehyphenlearning.blogspot.com and join us as we struggle through these difficult questions.