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## W&L freshmen experience serving poor in Richmond

By Karin Kapsidelis | **TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER**

*Washington and Lee University freshman Norris Laffitte was emptying a box at William Byrd Community House when Jessica Turner spied an old carnival banner. "I was looking for that," said Turner, the community relations coordinator for Byrd House, as she picked up the banner. Laffitte, of Columbia, S.C., was one of 14 W&L students helping to organize supplies stored in the Byrd gymnasium yesterday morning as part of a pre-orientation program known as Volunteer Venture.*

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"I was looking for that," said Turner, the community relations coordinator for Byrd House, as she picked up the banner.

Laffitte, of Columbia, S.C., was one of 14 W&L students helping to organize supplies stored in the Byrd gymnasium yesterday morning as part of a pre-orientation program known as Volunteer Venture.

On Saturday, the new students will report for orientation on the Lexington campus after spending this week sleeping on the floor at Bon Air Baptist Church and doing service-learning projects for nonprofit organizations in Richmond.

The program for first-year W&L students is offered in six cities, including Washington and Roanoke, and was expanded to Richmond for the first time this year.

Ten freshmen and four student leaders are in Richmond for the program, which is focused on poverty and health care. They threw away trash in the stifling Byrd House gym and weeded in the heat in front of the **Fan Free Clinic**, among other projects.

"It's a good example of how service isn't always glamorous," said Shiri Yadlin, a junior from California who is the coordinator for the Richmond program. "But these are all things that someone has to do."

Even the smallest chores help, said Kaitlyn Farley, a freshman from California, "because it frees other volunteers to do other things."

Farley said she signed up for the program because service work is "a big part of life at Washington and Lee, and I thought it would be eye-opening." The program has shown her how "poverty affects health care,

and vice versa," she said.

Part of what they learned this week was how to shop on a tight budget that can unexpectedly grow even tighter.

The students were divided into "families" and told to shop for a balanced meal to feed five. They were given a sealed envelope they were told contained \$14. But when they opened it before checking out, they found they had only \$10 and were forced to adapt their plans. A note explained that an "emergency," such as a flat tire or an ear infection, had cut into their budget, Yadlin said.

Nicole Gunawansa, a freshman from Portsmouth, said she was drawn to the program because she is already "a huge volunteer."

It's important "to take care of yourself and to take care of your community," she said.

"Plus I like Richmond," she added.

But this week has shown her a side of Richmond she hasn't seen on previous trips to visit friends and museums. She has learned there's "so much more outside of our own little bubbles."

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