

AU students will earn their Spring Break tans

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ALFRED, NY Thirty Alfred University students will join the Spring Break migration south this year, but their tans won't come from lying on the beach all day. They will be among the nearly 11,000 student volunteers who will help build homes through Habitat for Humanity's Collegiate Challenge. Alfred's student-run chapter of Habitat for Humanity heads to Deland, FL, each year to help build simple, decent and affordable homes for families in need. This year's trip is March 6-14. "This is such an exciting trip every year," said Matt Johnson, Alfred's chapter president. "It will be my fourth year making the trip. You get to work outside in the sun all day and it feels good to know that you have made a difference in somebody else's life." The students pay their way by raising money in the fall and winter through community projects and fund-raisers. They rake leaves, paint houses, hold sales and dinners. All the money raised goes toward traveling expenses and a donation to the host affiliate to help defray the costs of construction. Collegiate Challenge offers high school and college students year-round opportunities to serve communities by volunteering to build homes. Throughout its 16-year history the program has involved more than 90,000 students who have raised more than \$7 million to pay for construction. This year alone, students will contribute \$1 million to build 450 houses in 225 locations in rural and inner-city areas in the U.S. and Mexico. They will replace rundown shacks with simple homes, working alongside the new homeowners. This will be the third Habitat adventure for Alfred University senior Emily Shearer. She expects it to be as enjoyable and emotional as the first two. "It is almost impossible to put into words those feelings that I experience during the week, and especially on that last day," Shearer said. "After working side-by-side with the family and sharing conversations with them all week, it is most rewarding to know that we have directly affected the lives of two most deserving families. I only wish that everyone could experience a trip like this." Tony Francescutti, a graduate student at Alfred, is also a three-time Collegiate Challenge participant. He calls the experience "amazing." Students arrive at the work site the first day and find a concrete pad and a pile of lumber, he said. "By the end of that day we have a frame of a house and we are completely exhausted. Getting up the next morning is next to impossible, but once we start building again, our fatigue vanishes and we work all day, eager and energized." The end of the week comes and we feel like we just got there, but seeing the two houses standing in front of us houses that weren't there four days before reminds us what an incredible week it was." Francescutti said Habitat students return from their Florida Spring Break tired, but rejuvenated. "It's so refreshing knowing that you did something constructive with your time and were able to help someone else not just help them, but actually change their lives forever," he said. David Snyder, library assistant at Alfred's Herrick Memorial Library, accompanied the group last year when the regular advisor, Ken Hassler, couldn't go. When the group returned, Hassler asked Snyder to stay on as advisor. "I've always admired the Habitat organization, and last year I found out why," said Snyder. "It was gratifying to see our students molded together into a team and I was amazed at what they accomplished in one short week. Probably most gratifying was seeing children at the home that our students had built the previous year they were thrilled to see our bus." Millard Fuller, founder and president of Habitat for Humanity International, said he is encouraged each year by the response to Habitat's Collegiate Challenge. "We are excited that students want to get involved in helping families who are less fortunate," he said. "The future of the Habitat movement lies with young people." Habitat for Humanity International is a Christian ministry dedicated to eliminating poverty housing. Affiliates in more than 3,000 communities in 92 nations have built and sold more than 150,000 homes to partner families with no-profit, zero-interest mortgages.