

Service year begins for Catholic Volunteers in Florida

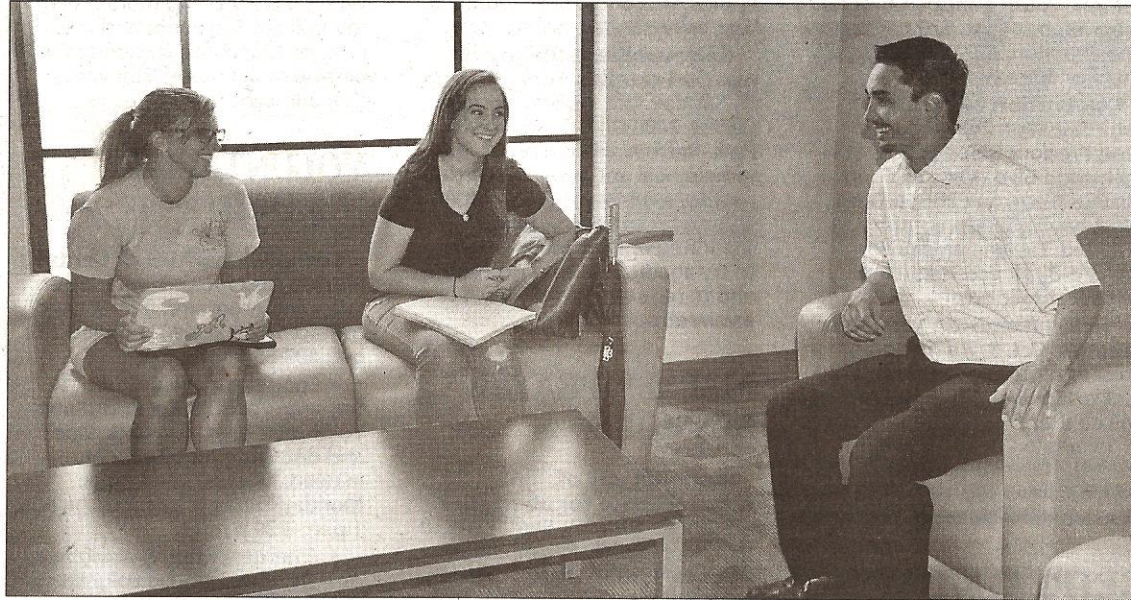
KATHERINE LAGUNA
of the Florida Catholic staff

ORLANDO | Fourteen volunteers began a year of service to those in need, following God's call to share their gifts and discover new talents as well.

Their year of service began Aug. 3 with Catholic Volunteers in Florida, where individuals are encouraged and challenged to "Become Who You Are" through a year of service. The program serves 8,500 people throughout Florida who are considered marginalized for a variety of reasons. Some of the locations where volunteers are assigned include Bishop Grady Villas in St. Cloud; Catholic Charities of Central Florida to assist in low-income families; New Hope for Kids that serves grieving children; and in parishes as needed. The organization's mission is to illustrate the beauty of service, one person at a time.

"What does it really mean for us to follow God's call?" asked Elizabeth Buckley, executive director of Catholic Volunteers in Florida. "We are always on a journey to discover God's purpose for our lives and serving others through (this program) is a wonderful way to grow spiritually."

Eddie Allen of Good Shepherd Parish in Orlando heard about the service opportunity through his mother, Elsie, who attended a presentation at St. Augustine Parish in



Eddie Allen, right, of Catholic Volunteers in Florida, greets University of Central Florida students Denver McClellan, left, and Devan Spinner before Mass at Catholic Campus Ministry. Allen is assigned to work with the campus ministry's young adults for his year of volunteer work. (KATHERINE LAGUNA | FC)

Casselberry.

"My mom got excited since this is exactly the type of group I wanted to be part of," said Allen, who is 29. "I'll be documenting different service sites, speaking to the faculty, some of the residents we serve and, if possible, our volunteer alumni."

"I know it's my passion to somehow serve God. I think volunteering will put me on a good path to see how I can be of service to my community." Allen is assigned to serve at Holy Family Parish in Orlando and Catholic Campus Ministry at the University of Central Florida in Orlando. He also hopes to use his talents in an artistic and fascinating way.

There are plenty of passionate alumni throughout the program's history. In 2010, 21-year-old Kieran Bulger from New York made the decision to relocate after graduating from the University of Notre Dame. He put aside an opportunity to ven-

ture into the business world immediately after college to serve as a financial assistance caseworker, helping families in crisis financial situations.

"When Catholic Charities funds are available or through annual collections, we help families with eviction notices remain in their homes," Bulger said. "We want to be a resource for them so they won't fall into a deeper cycle of poverty."

Bulger, who has a minor in poverty studies, said his education

prepared him to take on this role, although he credits his decision to join Catholic Volunteers in Florida to Valarie Amica, director of programs and service sites. His commitment to those in need continues as he recently started a job with Habitat for Humanity in New Orleans to assist low-income families there.

"I have respect for people who take on positions of service," Bulger said. "If you have the passion for serving others, we need more of you."

Amica, who has served the program for five years, believes volunteers who join the program use their education as helpful tools in service of others.

"We mesh the background of what our volunteers pursued in school with their faith," Amica said. "Those characteristics are the center of who they are and we try to help mentor them along the way, so they are on their path to reaching their full potential through service and faith." ■

If you are interested in serving, open enrollment for several positions is still available, including community development in Miami, farmworker health in Wimauma and housing assistance in Tampa. For more information about CVIF, please call 407-426-7771 or visit the website at volunteer@cvif.org.