



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

# Like a Good Neighbor . . .

The University earns national recognition as one of the ‘best neighbors’ a city can have.

By Kathleen McGarvey

EVERY MONDAY AND Wednesday morning, Faeza Masood '10 goes to School 29 in the city of Rochester for two hours to work one-on-one with Michael, a 4-year-old student there.

“We try to create an environment that’s different from their classroom, where they can develop social and reading skills that they wouldn’t necessarily develop in

▲ **CONNECTIONS:** Faeza Masood '10 works with Rochester elementary school student Michael Mitchell as part of the UReading program, one of many examples of the role the University plays in the life of the Rochester community.

a larger setting,” Masood says. “You can see the changes.”

Masood, a studio art major from Pittsford, N.Y., and other students are volunteers with UReading, a tutoring and mentoring program that pairs undergraduate students with preschool- and kindergarten-aged children at School 29 and the Rochester Pre-School Parent Program. The University created the program when its chapter of the AmeriCorp’s Jumpstart program closed during a nationwide reorganization.

“Student demand for the program is strong, as is interest from our community partners,” says Glenn Cerosaletti, director of the Rochester Center for Community Leadership. Created in collaboration with the Career Center and the Office of the Dean of

Students, the initiative is just one of many programs that forge ties between the University and the surrounding city, and contribute to the lives of people in Rochester.

And it’s a small example of the larger role that the University plays in the economic, social, and cultural life of the metropolitan area it calls home. The area’s largest employer, the University is the only college with its main campuses located within the city of Rochester. According to a 2008 report from the Center for Governmental Research, the University paid more than \$1.07 billion in wages to employees living in upstate New York; provided training for 46 percent of the doctors currently practicing in the region; purchased \$96 million worth of goods and services locally; spent an average of \$175 million per year on capital projects, supporting 2,800 construction-related jobs annually; and drew visitors who were responsible for more than 18,000 local hotel reservations.

Such impact recently earned the University a place on a list of the nation’s 25 “best neighbor” colleges and universities,

derived from a survey conducted by Evan Dobbelle, the president of Westfield State University.

“Colleges and universities, as well as the towns and cities in which they are located, are now under severe economic pressures. The positive financial impact of higher education on local communities is well-documented,” Dobbelle said when presenting his findings to the 15th annual conference of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities last fall. “Increasingly, more sophisticated partnerships are emerging that are addressing complex issues such as homelessness and health care and are serving as catalysts for community change.”

The survey considers such factors as the length of involvement with the community, real dollars invested, the catalyst effect on others, and faculty and student involvement in community service.

“The University recognizes and embraces its role in the community, and that role’s becoming clearer and clearer with each passing year,” Cerosaletti says.

Part of what the University concentrates on in its connection to the city is engagement, says Cerosaletti. “That’s a key part of what we do in the Rochester Center for Community Leadership. We try to make students aware of, and sensitive to, the issues facing the community.”

Recognition as a “best neighbor” indicates awareness that “we’ve matched our projects to the needs of the city,” he says.

“We live here for four years of our lives, and the University is such a bubble at times—but so much of what we do is involved with the city,” says Jacob Goldstein ’10, a history and religion major from Great Neck, N.Y. He is president of the Community Service Network, a club established in 1993 to facilitate student involvement in the city.

“We bring together different community service groups on campus to collaborate on projects,” he says. The network—which partners with student organizations such as Alpha Phi Omega, Habitat for Humanity, the Community Learning Center, and the Tiernan Project—helps to fund alternative spring break projects, for example, and, to make a difference locally, sponsors student volunteers in painting the Mt. Hope Family Center, hosts city children for trick or treating in Susan B. Anthony residence hall, and tutors local refugees.

Student service activities combine with efforts by the University to foster concrete

ties with the neighborhood, such as River-view Apartments, a five-building housing complex for students across the Genesee from the River Campus. “It makes the city more visibly students’ own community,” says Goldstein, who has been a tutor since his freshman year through Project Care at Rochester’s School 19.

“This sort of engagement”—seeing themselves as stakeholders in their community, being responsive to its needs—“is nothing new to our incoming students,” Cerosaletti

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says. Their application materials make clear that many are experienced community contributors.

“The challenge becomes introducing them to what is for most of them a new community, and to make this their home during the time they’re here.” Traditions such as Wilson Day, an annual day of community service for new and incoming Rochester students that marked its 21st anniversary this year, contribute to that bond.

Cerosaletti plans to create opportunities to align volunteer work with the


curriculum, allowing students to contribute expertise they have gained in their studies to the community. And he hopes that the connection they feel to the city around them will not fade.

“The majority of our students do leave Rochester as they go on to pursue graduate school and their careers, but I hope they’ll always maintain a vital connection to the Rochester community.”

Their interest in service proves enduring, too. Heather Clifford ’11, a psychology ma-

ior from Woodbury, N.Y., is president of the student group Partners in Reading. She and other volunteers work in classrooms for students between kindergarten and sixth grade at Rochester’s School 33 every Friday.

Based on her experiences there, Clifford is thinking about applying to Teach for America after graduation.

“You can make a difference, even if it’s just helping someone with math problems,” she says. “They might not have anyone else who can help, but this way they know there are people who will.” 

## UNIVERSITY-CITY CONNECTIONS

### Home, Sweet Home

As a way to help strengthen its ties with the city of Rochester, the University began offering inducements to employee home-buyers to purchase a house in the neighborhoods that surround the River Campus and Medical Center. Since 2008, more than 70 employees have participated in the University Home Ownership Incentive Program.

“It’s been a very positive move,” says Jason Myatt, a scientist at the Laboratory for Laser Energetics. He and his family relocated from a suburban apartment to a house in the city’s Highland Park neighborhood in December 2008.

“I wanted a walkable neighborhood, and it was beneficial if I could cycle to work,” he says. Now he enjoys a 15-minute bicycle ride to the laboratory and easy access on foot to other city attractions.

“There’s a real sense of neighborhood,” Myatt says of life on his new street. “There are lots of people there who care about the area.”

Under the program, the University, the city of Rochester and one of two financial institutions—Advantage Federal Credit Union and Canandaigua National Bank & Trust—together contribute up to \$9,000 toward the purchase of a primary residence in the neighborhoods closest to the University. In return, employees are required to agree to five-year occupancy and employment commitments. They also participate in homeownership education and counseling through NeighborWorks Rochester, a community-based nonprofit agency devoted to strengthening city neighborhoods.

—Kathleen McGarvey