

Christmas break was hard work for 46 from St. Bonaventure

Most of their time in Bahamas was spent working, not tanning

By KIP DOYLE
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ST. BONAVENTURE — It hasn't been all fun in the sun for St. Bonaventure University students who have been heading off to the Caribbean Islands this winter.

In December and January, students from the St. Bonaventure University chapter of Students in Free Enterprise have been working hard in the Bahamas, providing a host of services for seven schools — including renovating educational facilities, teaching classes, and updating the schools' computers.

Earlier this month, 46 students and five faculty members stayed in Pinder's Point while adding a fresh coat of paint to a building housing the Young Men's Technical Association and making renovations and improvements to the school and playground.

St. Bonaventure students were so involved in their work that they only spent two hours on the beach during

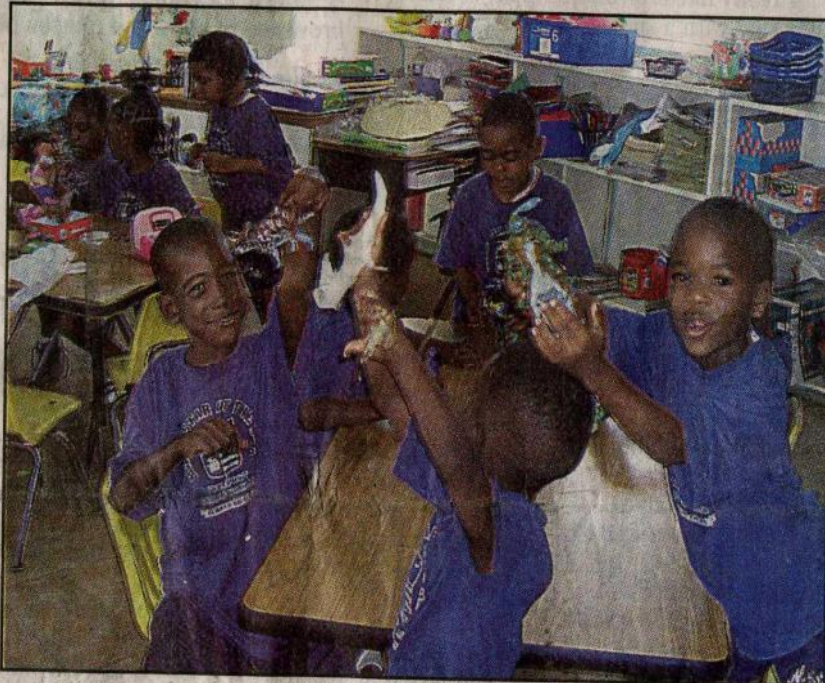


Photo submitted

Dinosaur science kits from Cattaraugus-Allegany BOCES went over well with Bahamian students, St. Bonaventure University student teacher Kim Phillips said. The kits are part of an effort to improve education in the Bahamas.

the 10-day trip, said Dr. Todd Palmer, St. Bonaventure Students in Free Enterprise adviser.

Students in Free Enterprise installed four computers donated by Databranch and taught 1,800 students

in seven schools the basics of entrepreneurship and global economics.

"This is a great opportunity to provide programs for young men ... to give them something of interest and some-

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thing beneficial," Dr. Palmer said. "Between the computers and the activities that are going to go on there, kids will have a lot of choosing in things to do in their spare time."

While working on the Young Men's Technical Association building, the students were greeted by the Bahamian Prime Minister Perry Christie who was in the area for a meeting. Prime Minister Christie saw the work done and seemed impressed, students said.

"Meeting the prime minister was a cool thing but I am glad to see the work we did," St. Bonaventure student Andrew Mantilia said. "I am glad he could see that there are a lot of people out there who care about helping others and that we want to make a difference."

Science kits provided through Cattaraugus-Allegany BOCES went over well with Bahamian students, who could not get enough of the dinosaur kit, said St. Bonaventure University student teacher Kim Phillips. Mrs. Phillips teaches at Mary Star Primary School in Pinder's Point.

Student teachers who made the trip are planning to start the only after-school program on Grand Bahamas island.

"It has turned out to be a wonderful relationship between the students and the community," Dr. Palmer said.

During the trip in December, the student-led organization installed two computers at Holmes Rock Primary. The computers would allow students to use basic Microsoft Office products and the Internet. The school previously had no computers.

Students in Free Enterprise also repaired computers at Mary Star Primary School, which had software damage preventing students from using basic programs. With the computers there and at St. Vincent de Paul, Bahamian students were able to talk to students in Olean via Yahoo! Messenger and Macromedia breeze.

"Having these computers down here and fixed is a huge deal for these kids," said Jeff Rathmann, president of Students in Free Enterprise. "It allows them to do so much and further expand their education. Holmes only has two computers, but that's a lot better than their situation before."

St. Bonaventure's chapter of the Students in Free Enterprise is also co-developing an economic development zone in Pinder's Point to help continue growth in the area.

While helping the people of the Bahamas, the St. Bonaventure students are engaging in a rare experience, Dr. Palmer said.

"The experience from the students' perspective is really incredible," he said. "For St. Bonaventure students, it's an unparalleled opportunity."