

The Positive Effects of Community Partnerships

by: Meghan Spaulding

Over the last few years Andy and I have had the honor of building a partnership with Keene State College that goes beyond sports. Partnering with a local college has been very beneficial for us. We have been working with different departments throughout the campus to bring real life experience to KSC students. Perhaps reading about what Andy and I have done with the College will give you ideas on projects you can collaborate on with a community partner in your area.

Over the year Andy has worked with the Geography program on a Wayfinding and Landscape Values Mapping project. Wayfinding is the ability to “find your way” or navigate through an unfamiliar or foreign environment. Our Planning department assisted Andy with this project as well. In Keene, Wayfinding includes creating pedestrian-friendly streets (walkability) and increasing overall bikeability of the City by improving existing bike paths and the safety of crosswalks.

The goal of this project was “to use Landscape Values Mapping (LVM) to: explore how visitors to Ashuelot River Park and Goose Pond Forest use the spaces for different activities; identify potential conflicts of use; and find opportunities to increase access to these valuable natural areas.” The author describes the City of Keene as being well known for its commitment to promoting sustainability. Participants were surveyed both online as well as on paper, which was collected in person within both parks. The survey results revealed how highly the community of Keene values the parks. There were many recommendations for improvements but most visitors expressed that the parks present natural beauty should not be sacrificed.

The previous rail beds (known as the Cheshire Rail Trail and the Ashuelot Rail Trail) allow people to enjoy recreational activities that connect communities, farms, restaurants, local businesses and parks. This network of trails is a huge asset to the city and surrounding communities. Having the KSC study monitoring the project ensures that the trails are properly labeled and are convenient to access.

Learn more about Wayfinding:

http://sites.keene.edu/geography/files/2018/01/2017_SeminarFinalWayfinding_kscGeography.pdf

Another department we work with is the Architecture program; both Andy and I have worked with the second year students throughout the spring semester. This spring we were able to see their vision and hear their ideas about remodeling our playground building in Robin Hood Park, which is our signature park on the east side of Keene. The students’ focus was on project cost, working within zoning regulations, and biggest challenge— staying within the original foot print. Over the years, Andy has been able to have different classes look at creating an ice rink, a new recreation center and redeveloping our front park. As we do these projects, not only does it help

us see the students' perspective, but also inspires us to start thinking about moving forward with each project and how best to complete it.

Our after school program, CATCH, offers a cooking program. For the last seven years we have had Keene State College practicum students organize and run that part of the program. These nutrition majors plan, shop and execute a healthy cooking program and also provide healthy snacks. We wouldn't be able to do our program without those two students each semester.

This past year Keene State had a new degree option: Child and Youth Physical Activity Specialist (CYPAS). This program gave us a chance to work within that department and to utilize interns. This past spring we were able to take on two seniors who were doing their final internships. They were able to work within or develop programs for youth 18 and under. In the coming years we are excited to welcome more interns and to help develop the recreation part of the program.

For our youth sports program we have developed a very strong partnership with the KSC Student Athlete-Advisory Council. They run our K-1 basketball program throughout the winter months. Every Saturday morning we have coaches, teams and even the Athletic Director here, guiding, teaching and inspiring young community members.

This partnership with Keene State College has been invaluable by giving students the opportunity to bring innovative ideas into our department. Our programs couldn't be as successful without Keene State in our community. Not only are we able to teach the next generation about parks and recreation, but they are teaching us what we can do if we just think outside of the box. If you have a local college within your area, we highly recommend making those connections. Our department has been very thankful for the connections we've made and we are always looking forward to the next project with the students.