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### DAY ONE OF SERVICE

#### FRESHMEN ROLL UP THEIR SLEEVES AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | August 23, 2024

*Read time: about 3 min*

Continuing a Day One tradition, more than 400 students fanned out across the community to do good and make a difference. The day introduces year-one students to the importance of service - one of CNU's four pillars.

"Today is a great day. This is what we do here," said President William G. Kelly. "We serve our community. We want Day One of Service to be followed by day 2, 3, 4 and beyond."

## Serving and Leading



At nearby Yorktown Elementary, a group of freshmen began the day by dumping loads of fresh soil into garden beds at Yorktown Elementary School, helping to form a foundation for youngsters to grow fruits and veggies.

The hard work the first-year students did throughout the day not only helped the local community, but also deepened their roots as Captains who focus on service during their collegiate journey and beyond.

“The essence of leadership is not just about the work you do in classrooms, but the impact you make beyond them,” Vanessa Buehlman, director of the [Center for Community Engagement](#), told the freshmen.

Day One of Service, in its 17th year, is meant to be just that, the first of many days of meaningful service.

Students began the day early, gathering at the Ferguson Center for the Arts just after sunrise. They boarded buses to 43 sites all over the Peninsula, energized and excited to begin their CNU journey on such a high note. They did a little bit of everything, from helping area teachers prepare their classrooms for the new year, to beautifying grounds, to helping at the Virginia Peninsula Foodbank and the Habitat for Humanity’s ReStore. It was an all-out effort to create goodwill, to engage, and to make a huge impact on their new community.

“You have the ability to make a difference in the lives of others,” said Lacey Grey Hunter, Director of the [President’s Leadership Program](#). “What you are doing today is not about you, but helping those in the community.”

For students, the purpose of the day aligned with their goals and values.

“Giving back is very important to me,” said Sydney Rumburg, a freshman from Hampton, Va.

The day was also significant for Preston Hoexum, who came to CNU from Grand Rapids, Mich. He saw it as a chance to return the support shown to him.

“I know people in my community supported me and gave back to me,” he said. “This is my chance to give back. Just to see the smiles on people’s faces and to know they have less work to do now is great.”

It wasn’t all first-year students doing the work. Sophomore Maddie Mojica led the team at Yorktown Elementary, serving as mentor, friend and leader. Last year, Mojica, [Political Science](#) and [Leadership Studies](#), was so inspired by the experience that she returned this year to take on a leadership role.

Mojica believes service promotes connections and friendships, not to mention the ability to bring about change in the community. A member of PLP, a [Community Captain](#), and a [Wason Scholar](#), Mojica has embraced living a life fortified with service, and wants to pass her passion for it on to newest Captains. She was eager Thursday to enlighten members of the Class of 2028 about the potential of volunteer work.

“Service is such a huge part of CNU. Most students serve. I hope these students will choose to keep serving,” she said.

As a Community Captain, Mojica was introduced to Christopher Newport as a high school student and encouraged to continue her education at CNU or any other four year school. She chose Christopher Newport.

“I want to give back to the program that has given so much to me,” she said.

Just a bit down the road from Yorktown Elementary, students descended on Dream Catchers Therapeutic Riding Center in Toano, Va. Their mission was to paint, mulch, rake, and do whatever they could to help maintain the grounds.

“It’s been really fun. It’s nice to be out in nature,” said Shyzear Brown, from Hampton, Va. “I think this is very important. It’s nice to give back. It’s not just hours in, it’s connecting and putting yourself out there.”

Gracie Close, from Chesapeake, Va., said the experience pushed her outside of her comfort zone.

“It’s something new,” she said.

While she was painting an obstacle course, she and Meredith Woodruff, from Poquoson, Va., connected, realizing that they both wanted to major in kinesiology.

“I definitely think it’s been amazing,” Woodruff said.

The students at Dream Catchers were led by Dr. Ashley Fournet, a professor in the [Luter School of Business](#), and Dr. Kip Redick, chair of the [Department of Philosophy and Religion](#).

“It’s great for many reasons,” Fournet said. “It helps them to meet new people and it’s a great opportunity to interact with a community most are new to.”

Service, Redick said, “is a life lesson.”

“For me, education is mostly about the growth of a person, not about mastering information,” he said. “Service fits with the goal of developing the whole person, body and mind.”

As students completed the work, they were reminded that Day One of Service was just the first step in their journey as a Captain and encouraged to maintain the momentum of the service they began on Thursday.

“If you make service a treasured part of your life now, you will continue to look for opportunities to service for years to come in whatever community you call home,” said President Kelly. “From experience, I can tell you it is one of the best things you can do and I’m so proud of you for being part of this day and for being a Captain.”

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