

**THE FACE OF PHILANTHROPY**

**Working Vacation**

**A** YOUNG MAN in his 20s writes in a blog about how exhausted he is after spring break.

"It is 5 a.m. in Lake Charles and I am having a hard time sleeping," he writes from Louisiana. "This is horribly ironic considering all that I have wanted for the past five weeks is a solid night's sleep...The past month has quite possibly been the best month of my life."

The young man is not tired for the reasons one might think, however. He is one of several hundred people who have participated in Alternative Spring Break, a program created by United Way of America for college-age volunteers.

The program takes place during the last week of February through the month of March. Since it was started in 2006 to help the Gulf Coast recover from hurricanes that devastated the region, the program has sent volunteers from all over the country to build new homes, install roofs, remove debris, and joined in other efforts.

The program has now grown so popular

that it will expand beyond the Gulf Coast to Detroit, where volunteers will undertake projects to help poor people struggling because of the city's stagnant economy.

Randy Punley, a United Way official, says that 1,300 young people have applied for approximately 500 slots available this year.

United Way has received \$650,000 in commitments thus far from FedEx, Gatorade, and the consulting firm Deloitte for this year's youth-engagement programs, which includes the Alternative Spring Break.

Online social networks, such as Facebook, MySpace, and Think MTV, have been key in recruiting volunteers, says Mr. Punley. Alternative Spring Break participants share their experiences via a blog, sometimes including video accounts of their work.

Here, a group of Alternative Spring Break volunteers gathers to repair the hurricane-damaged home of this woman in Lake Charles, La.

—CAROLINE BERMUDEZ

*Photograph by Michael Crossett for United Way*



**ALTERNATIVE  
SPRING BREAK**

**FedEx** **GameStop** **United Way**  
*EBGAMES*