

# Muncie youth, adults 'SERVE' their community through volunteerism

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(Photo: Jordan Kartholl / Star Press)

MUNCIE, Ind. — It all starts with a game of “Simon Says.” More than 200 people stand in Union Chapel Ministries’ auditorium, following senior pastor Gregg Parris, or in this case, Simon. [Fullscreen](#)

One by one, defeated gasps fill the room as Simon outsmarts his opponents. Giggles bounce from wall to wall as friends watch friends get outsmarted.

## Union Chapel's SERVE volunteers help with community wide projects

The 15-minute game ends with nine champions. One by one the nine return to their chairs and the room lulls to a quiet murmur.

It's the beginning of a 17-year-old tradition at the church.

In 2002, Union Chapel launched SERVE Week to get local youth to work in the community for a week. The first week saw 35 participants, and now the community-focused effort has more than 450 volunteers.

“I think it’s a testament to people’s value of serving our city,” said SERVE Director Jeff Hughes. “Once people have experienced this, no matter their age, and seen the value that comes, they really want to do it again, and they want to bring a friend with them next time.”

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Union Chapel volunteers clean cars used by Muncie Mission staff as part of SERVE week Tuesday afternoon. (Photo: Jordan Kartholl / Star Press)

Over the course of a week, parks will dot fresh coats of paint, roofs will be repaired and food will be cooked and given out.

However, the week of service isn't random volunteerism. The purpose of SERVE is to clean up, show care and concern for Muncie by meeting practical needs, according to a release.

# Kids, teens and adults volunteer to SERVE this week

Hughes said volunteers will donate time to almost every nonprofit organization in Muncie during the week including: Muncie Mission, Second Harvest Food Bank, YMCA, Beyond I Can, Blood 'n' Fire, First Choice for Women, Rising Hope, Muncie Community Schools, Bridge Community Services, Golden Living Nursing Home, Bethel Pointe Health and Rehabilitation Center, Morrison Woods, Treefort, Tuhey Pool, Soup Kitchen of Muncie, Yorktown Manor, Albany Health & Rehabilitation Center and Muncie neighborhoods.

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Monday, groups led by coaches and team leaders such as Austin Craig, started their first acts of service. Some groups sorted food at pantries, while others completed yard work.

Craig, a Ball State student who has been involved with the event since 2013, said there's something about working alongside people his age and younger that draws him back.

"You're focused on serving people in Muncie and you're doing it alongside high schoolers, middle schoolers, which are so important to the community," he said. "[There's] something about doing that and being dead tired and being hot ... but for some reason at the end of the week, you're not ready to leave. It always turns around and you're just never ready to leave."

For Yorktown native Haley Johnson, the week serves as a way to learn more about how people live in Muncie.

"It's like a mission trip around your own city," she said. "It opens your eyes to what you don't usually see around and you see how people are living and how you can help."

Johnson, who's been involved for 13 years, said the most eye-opening experience she had was when she helped paint a single mother's home and tended to the yard.

"It's made me realize how blessed I am and how much people need help, and how I can be the help in their life," she said.

SERVE Week will end with a community-wide celebration for all residents from 5:30-8:30 p.m. Friday in the parking lot of Union Chapel. The party will include free food, a dunk tank, inflatable and carnival games, a rock climbing wall, an entertainment stage, a BMX stunt show, craft tents and a children's train, according to a release.

*Mary Freda is an intern at the Star Press. Follow her on Twitter @Mary\_Freda1, and email her story ideas: mfreda@muncie.gannett.com.*

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