



IT'S A FRIDAY AFTERNOON, and you've just gotten out of your 10 a.m. class. Shaking your head, you walk towards Java Wally's to wake up out of the mid-morning droll. You see several young men passing out newspapers and conversing outside of the library. You motion to your friend to go the other way, but it's too late. You've made eye contact, and you are headed right towards them. Smiling at your shoes and pretending to be greatly engaged in your conversation about the explosive ability of Drano, you avoid the interaction and walk on.

EDUCATION IN EMPATHY



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THIS SITUATION MAY FEEL FAMILIAR. You could have been in this position before: being so preoccupied with thought that the will to listen or care about another person's point of view becomes lost. With the sheer amount of opinions floating through the airwaves and cyberspace, a physical *being* greeting you with an opinion may become just as annoying as a pop-up ad. Dismiss. Click. Ignore.

However, RIT hosts a multitude of charitable and activist organizations, and many of their efforts go unseen. Because one might not have the time to sit down and talk with every group, %Reporter% took the time to ask, "Why?" to some notable activist groups: the Student Environmental Action League, the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, the Rochester Civil Rights Front and the Rochester

Student Environmental Action League (SEAL)

AS IT SAYS in the name, the SEAL organization is all about "taking action." A quieter approach to environmental activism, SEAL seeks to change the culture of RIT through recycling and awareness events. Instead of hitting the pavement with a bullhorn and an attitude, SEAL attempts to make environmental awareness the mainstream.

To do this, SEAL spearheads many projects and events. "Project Runway," a fashion show challenging students to make outfits from post-consumer waste, gives recycling a much-needed sex appeal. Their efforts in E-cycling is another important contribution to the RIT campus, collecting thousands of pounds of computers and other equipment to be responsibly disposed.

But what makes a SEAL-er tick? Is it an impending fear of the apocalypse? A zealous Luddite crusade to make Rochester an agrarian utopia?

The answer may be surprising. Club webmaster Ryan Ammerman, a fifth year Information Technology student, feels compelled to volunteer almost every weekend out of a simple appreciation for the natural world. Growing up in rural Pennsylvania, he saw value in his home and wanted to preserve it. "Picking up trash might not sound like that big of a deal. But having so many people come out and do it, you know when you walk away [that] you made a better place," said Ammerman.

Seeing an immediate, local effect of their work, as opposed to spending hours lobbying or trying to affect national change, is an important part of SEAL's mission. "We don't try to stress the environmental activism to such a degree, so we don't scare people away," said Tori Larson, publicity chair and third year Animation student. Bridging the gap between hopeless attitudes and total denial, SEAL tries to get students interested in environmentalism by giving them something they can do with their hands not just with their mouths.



The poverty he witnessed made him feel "appalled" at the waste of developed countries. Upon returning to the United States, McKimpson re-evaluated his old dream of working for a defense contractor. "I thought, 'do I want to make things that bomb people? Or do I want to make things that help people,'" McKimpson said. With this new mindset, he plans to pursue a dual degree (BS/MS) in RIT's newly-minted Sustainable Engineering program. McKimpson wants to develop an affordable bacterial process to purify drinking water, called bio-remediation.

Both Martin and McKimpson want to address social justice issues using their environmental science training. A huge problem that they are hoping to address in Rochester is the issue of lead water pipes in low-income housing. Unfortunately, they know that some people may not want to join them based on the issue of faith.

"For us, a lot of the reason we're getting involved is the love that God has shown us. He's definitely given us passion and motivation for these kind of things," said Martin. But the IVCF did not want to remain an island; they tried to find common ground and coordinate with other like-minded individuals. To do this, they created an unofficial network of other activist groups affectionately known as the "Justice League." While their activities may consist of simple event sharing and promotion, the new group begins to overcome differences in beliefs.

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF)

TROY MARTIN, a fifth year Environmental Science student, was awakened to the pertinent need that exists in the city through the Rochester Urban Plunge. The alternative spring break gave IVCF members a one-week immersion to see what downtown Rochester is really like.

Hosted by the Parsells Avenue Community Church, the group spent their days learning about the city's problems, especially the struggling public school system. Moved by his experience, Martin organized a tutoring program at Rochester's Center for Youth, helping in a GED class. While many of them have been influenced by a generational poverty, Martin wants them to see education as an achievable goal. "For me, it's just showing them that they are loved," he explained.

Neal McKimpson, a third year Industrial & Systems Engineering student, was drawn towards social justice causes after a trip to Guyana.

Rochester Civil Rights Front (CRF)

MAKING MARRIAGE POSSIBLE for couples of all sexual orientations is the goal of the CRF. Formed last June, the CRF (which is comprised mostly of college students) is putting pressure on Governor Patterson to approve legislation that would legalize same sex marriages in New York State. Sponsoring the "Buckwild for Busses" event at the Bug Jar bar and the "Big Gay Wedding," (see pg. 4) the men and women of the CRF look for support in unconventional ways.

The group members are a diverse collection, representing many sexual orientations and political backgrounds, but many strangely have not been passionate about one thing like this until now. "I had never participated in any activist group," explained Joanna Rudolph, a third year Fine Art Photography major. It wasn't until another student involved with the CRF expressed his opinion during a heated discussion about homosexual rights in philosophy class and invited his classmates to get involved that Rudolph decided to join in the effort.

Now a regular member of the group, Rudolph does not see why more do not act on the beliefs they have. "It's not as hard as it sounds ... I always stood back because I didn't want to be one of those people holding signs and getting arrested, but it's the little things that you do to support the rest of the community," he said.

Melissa Kelsey, a Women's Gender Studies major at SUNY Brockport and a Java Wally's barista, has taken a leadership role in the CRF. "It's easy to feel small, like you don't have [a say in society]," she commented. Her way of breaking through the bubble is by talking with students individually. She wants others to be as personally invested in the issue of marriage equality as she is; therefore, she takes the time to connect with people through conversation.



CURIOSITY

RETURNING to the hypothetical situation, you are leaving Java's, your mind reawakened, re-caffeinated. If someone asked why you kept walking; you probably could come up with a host of reasons. Perhaps you virulently disagree with their point of view. Or maybe, you already are involved with some similar effort, and one more worthy cause would likely break the bank. In the case of RIT, there is probably a degree of social awkwardness underpinning the entire interaction, and it would take a significant degree of courage to muster the curiosity.

Curiosity is fundamental to excelling in the lab, classroom or studio.

INNOVATION Not just for Gadgets

INNOVATION is a word thrown around a lot. But this word does not have to have the connotation of nifty gadgets like a hot dog machine or a table that reacts to the human touch. To the students involved in the many activist organizations on campus, their education is not through the creation of consumer products. Their ideas of how to fix social and eco-

Rochester International Socialist Organization (ISO)

RIT'S BRANCH of the ISO may be RIT's most visible revolutionary presence due to their Friday newspaper distribution. But their actual specific beliefs and attitudes towards certain elements of RIT culture may be of a surprise to some students.

"We come from parents who work their asses off so that we can come to college," said Kevin Sapere, a fifth year Urban and Community Studies major. To them, RIT is more than simple brick arrangements and conversations about the weather. Rather, they see their experience as building upon the historical struggle of the working class.

One challenge that besets the socialists is their conflicting position as motivated, career driven RIT students and dreamers of a world without destructive capitalist competition. "There is no way that any person who is in the system cannot participate in it," says Adriano Contreras, a fifth year Multidisciplinary studies student. To attempt to give meaning to a school community with an often radically different worldview, they gather weekly, selling the Socialist Worker newspapers. They do this to "gauge student opinion," and get others to question political events.

Without descending into rhetoric, many socialists refer to a capitalist "system" when talking about everyday life in today's mixed economy. They identify the RIT campus as a microcosm of this system. "A college is really a business. There is a reason why the board of trustees is full of guys like Lockheed Martin and the Wilmorite Corporation," said Sapere.

The ISO takes a view towards education that lies outside of a system of exploiting the working class. Encouraging students not to pursue education for the sake of a job but for "knowledge," Josh Karpoff, a fifth year Electrical Engineering and Technology major, wishes the school was not simply a "training ground for large corporations." Karpoff explained, "We're not raging against the idea of structure. We are angry about the way the structure is used for."

Entering into a school community means interacting with ideas, cultures and people, all while encountering misinformation, stereotypes and difficult personalities. A cultivated sense of curiosity for people who care about the RIT community changes the way we treat each other. You may be compelled to pick up your head and initiate the conversation.

The activists on campus are a special breed; they give their time and talents to an often-unforeseen end or goal. However, their beginnings at RIT were not casted with purpose, rather, they were motivated to change their routines, following through on gut impulses and inclinations.

nomie problems or how to change political systems are just as evident of innovative thinking. The sheer amount of problems in the world suggests an infinite number of solutions, and it would be a bleaker campus if everyone were concerned with individualistic matters of the status quo and moneymaking. •