

EXTREME Service



Many college students dream of achieving something greater than themselves and making a positive impression on the lives of others through service. Unfortunately, these students are often unaware of how to accomplish these goals. Alon Kvashny, Chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture at Texas Tech University, provides service opportunities to his students through a classroom setting.

Base Plan

Kvashny has always lived a life of service. He was born and raised in Israel and later served in the Israeli Army. After completion of his military service, Kvashny came to the United States in pursuit of a degree in landscape architecture. Kvashny completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Georgia and received his master's degree at the University of Michigan. From there, he went on to serve as the senior landscape architect of Jerusalem.

"That was an exciting time because it was a few years after the Six-Day War, and the whole city was annexed," Kvashny said. "There were a lot of projects that I didn't even have the chance to do the real drawings for, but I had about 300 people that I had to give jobs to, so we did a lot of projects."

After he moved back to the United States in 1972, Kvashny's service continued. He taught at West Virginia University and completed his doctorate in engineering education and curriculum instruction.

"I figured if I was teaching, I might as well learn a little more about what teaching is all about," said Kvashny with a smile.

Implementation

Kvashny combined his military service, unique work opportunities, and college learning experience to develop a personal teaching strategy. His students excel in the classroom, where they work individually, as well as together, to develop teamwork skills and outstanding character.

In 2000, Kvashny accepted a job as the Chair of the Landscape Architecture program at Texas Tech and began to instill motivation and enthusiasm into his students and faculty members.

In fall 2010, Kvashny was asked to take his passion for service beyond the classroom. He received a call from a Lubbock landscaping company, Paradise Lawns, and was asked to design a landscape for the Brown family, who tragically lost their 17-year-old daughter in a texting and driving accident.

The Brown family, who resides in Wellman, Texas, was featured on the popular television show "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" January 30, 2011 on ABC.

"When he called me and asked if I would like to be involved in this, I immediately said, 'Yeah!'" explained Kvashny, enthusiastically.

A few months before filming took place, Kvashny worked with the Extreme Makeover team to design a

southwestern-themed landscape for the Brown family. Kvashny said that as soon as the contractors went on-site, he was there to help with completion of the project. During the implementation process, Kvashny rallied together more than 90 landscape architecture students and several faculty members to help with the installation of the project, all of who wore Texas Tech logos on their hard hats.

The pace of the project was fast and furious, but with the help of hundreds of volunteers, the project was completed within a few days. Kvashny said working with volunteers was his favorite part of the experience. He said it was rewarding to see a design implemented so quickly and to be involved in all stages of the design. However, he was most excited that his students were able to learn through their service experience.

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"I think the students benefited a lot from seeing a drawing and how the plan is implemented all the way to completion," Kvashny said. "It allowed them to work together and for a good cause. It showed them that monetary benefits should not be driving every project."

Environmental Impact

Although this is the only nationally publicized project in which Kvashny's students have participated, it is not the only service opportunity he has offered to them.

Christine Casanova, graduate student in landscape architecture, said she loves Kvashny's ability to teach by allowing his students to serve others. They often do service learning projects in his classroom.

"Service learning is an academic tool where students practice the application of newly acquired skill sets in projects that serve the community," Casanova explained. "He teaches us through the practice in these projects."

Casanova said she is impressed by Kvashny's integrity and ability to constantly provide his students with outstanding learning experiences.

"You can tell his character by the kind of work that he brings to his classroom for us to practice on," Casanova said. "He is a man of integrity, character... he is compassionate, he is kind, and he makes learning fun."

Kvashny's students are not the only ones impressed by his leadership skills.

Alex Scarborough, Texas Tech alumnus, never had Kvashny as a teacher, but he worked for Kvashny as a visiting lecturer for several semesters.

Scarborough praises Kvashny's ability to lead his department by example, specifically during the Extreme Makeover project. He said that by participating in Extreme Makeover, Kvashny demonstrated his love for teaching and his eagerness to touch the lives of others.

"When the head guy of anything gets involved, it adds a lot of credibility and momentum," Scarborough said. "By being active in those type of things, he creates a kind of team spirit that communities and educational institutions can benefit from."

Though the show is over, Kvashny will not rest long. He is already working on a new project with the Lubbock Homebuilders Association. Through the project, called Operation Finally Home, he is designing a landscape for retired Corporal Anthony Villarreal and his wife.

"I think this family deserves it at least as much [as the Browns]," Kvashny said, "and there will not be a lot of hoopla as far as the TV and all of that stuff."

Kvashny's display of continuous leadership and service within his community and the Department of Landscape Architecture is inspiring to his students and faculty. Thanks to his guidance, landscape architecture students have been able to achieve the goal of serving their community and making a positive impression on the lives of others. 



A Abigail Scarborough Jones | Lubbock, Texas

