

Youth volunteers helping build BR community center

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- Published: Apr 27, 2008 - UPDATED: 12:05 a.m.

Ten-year-old Derez Dixon grasped an oversized pair of wire cutters clipping away at barbed wire woven through a metal chain-link fence Saturday morning.

He was one of more than 100 volunteers gathered to spruce up the exterior of an abandoned recycling plant that will become the Bread of Life Community Resource Center that's set to open June 1.

"I just felt like doing some hard work," said Dixon, a fourth-grader at Broadmoor Elementary School.

Most of the volunteers came from City Year's middle school and high school leadership development programs and were fixing up the building as their Global Youth Service Day project, said Kori Thomas, program manager for City Year Louisiana.

Dixon came out to volunteer with his brother, Jairyn Rogers, 13, a member of City Year's Young Heroes program and a Broadmoor Middle School seventh-grader.

Rogers and the others in the Young Heroes program — middle school students from across the parish — spend three Saturdays a month doing service projects around the city.

"My favorite part is helping out the community and hanging out with friends," Rogers said. "I thank my mom for bringing me."

Standing beside the center, which had a fresh coat of purple paint, Rev. Belinda Washington said she was grateful for City Year's help.

"City Year has been wonderful," she said. "The work that they're doing is worth thousands of dollars."

Washington said the Bread of Life Community Center, 2321 Scenic Highway, would serve impoverished families and at-risk adults with day-care services for single parents, adult literacy classes and other forms of direct aid.

The nonprofit, faith-based center is partnered with Project Jumpstart and the 8th district African Methodist Church Hurricane Relief Center, Washington said.

As Kiara Louis waited in a shaded tent for lunch, she said she spent the morning picking up weeds around the property.

Louis, 15 and an eighth-grader at Kenilworth Middle School, said she enjoys her work with Young Heroes.

“It teaches us how to be leaders in our community,” she said.

Angie Lau, a veteran of City Year from Minnesota who is now a project manager with the organization, said that she wants the young volunteers to see how their work will benefit the community when the center opens.

“I want these kids to see they are making a difference,” Lau said.