

WILLING TO SERVE



Suzanne Rehak photo

Elsik ninth grade Advanced Leadership and Service students Reginald Taylor, Moneice Hall, Jerome Kirby, James Babayo, Yesenia Vega, Cindy Rodriguez, Constance Murdock,

Virginia Guevara, Anestis Arias and their sponsor Chrissann Justice. The students made 115 quilts for Project Linus, a nationwide group that collects blankets for children.

Elsik students craft 115 quilts for critically ill

By **KYLE W. FAKE**
Chronicle correspondent

VISITORS to Chrissann Justice's fourth-period class at Elsik's Ninth Grade Center, 6767 S. Dairy Ashford, might have thought they stepped into a home economics class.

There, for 1½ hours every other day, 11 ninth-grade students in her Advanced Leadership and Service class could be seen at a sewing machine, cutting fabric and pinning batting.

The 14- and 15-year-old students created 115 quilts for Project Linus, a nationwide group that collects blankets to give to children, most of who are critically ill, in hospitals, Justice said.

During spring break five students from the class delivered 200 quilts, made by volunteers from a number of area organizations, to children at Hermann Children's Hospital.

In all, the 11 ALAS students — Anestis Arias, James Babayo, Virginia Guevara, Moneice Hall, Jerome Kirby, Samantha Miller, Constance Murdock, Susana

Ovalle, Cindy Rodriguez, Reginald Taylor and Yesenia Vega — put in 1,300 community service hours and raised \$1,500 through fund-raising projects to buy a sewing machine, 300 yards of fabric, 150 yards of batting, thread, yarn and other notions to make the quilts.

Their individual names appear on the underside of the quilts on tags supplied by Project Linus.

The students applied to Wal-Mart for a grant to fund the project, and received \$400 and a 10 percent discount that al-

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lowed them to purchase a sewing machine and materials needed to make the initial quilts.

They raised \$300 from doughnut and candy bar sales, and from a fund-raiser held throughout the Alief Independent School District administration building headed by Chuck Lang. One Elsik Ninth Grade Center teacher donated \$60 so each student could make a quilt for themselves.

Justice, who also teaches Spanish at the Ninth Grade Center, said the 11 students decided to make the quilts — a craft her mother taught her when she was 14 in Latin America — after considering a number of other service projects.

When they were not working on quilts, the students studied Sean Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, the textbook for the class run by the Leadership Center, part of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service and Texas A & M University.

"It's a good book," said Samantha Miller, 15. "It helps people understand others and themselves. I think every teen should have one."

The program's goal is to instill leadership skills and the willingness to do community service. Justice's students surpassed the program's required 35 hours of community service, each accumulating 75 hours through the quilt project as well as working with their synagogues and churches or babysitting for family members.

ALAS students must fill out an application showing what kind of student they are and what they have achieved thus far. Some came directly from Elsik's eighth-grade sister program, Young Leaders in Action.

"We looked for students who wanted to work hard at something, who had a desire to be a better person and who were inter-

ested in being a leader," said Justice, who underwent a one-day Leadership Center training and three-day Stephen Covey training.

Throughout the year the students reviewed their goals and examined what is it that makes a person a leader.

"Some kids are rebelling against leaders," Justice said. "We discussed why you need them."

They also discussed being proactive; how to handle obstacles proactively, said Justice, who included a showing of the film *Lorenzo's Oil* in the class as an example of how the willingness to learn can effect change.

Justice said she has noticed incredible changes among the students in the past year.

During a recent awards ceremony, Anestis Arias, who turns 15 in August, told students they may look at these quilts and think, oh that's easy. He said it's a lot easier to write a good paper or beat someone at sports.

"It took me three weeks to finish the first blanket (as I'm) new at sewing and pinning anything. Then I started getting the idea and was more efficient," said Arias, who made 11 quilts in the remaining eight weeks.

He said the biggest lesson he learned from this project is that there is nothing so satisfying as doing something really hard for someone else.

"My hard work will pay off for myself and other people. It will give them joy and happiness," Arias said.

Arias, who wants to be either a doctor or lawyer, said this was the first time he did community service with a group. He said the class has taught him to "take all responsibilities for yourself and don't let other people do the work for you."

Jerome Kirby, 15, said the class was pretty interesting. He liked the field trip where students learned about table etiquette and the trip to Austin to visit State Representatives.

He said the class members realized that hands-on activities work better than reading a book. Kirby wants to get a high GPA in high school and then go to college, where he will study either law or medicine.

Moneice Hall, 15, said she would recommend this class to others.

"It helps you get you ready for the real world, helps define yourself and learn responsibilities, how to better ourselves, how to make better choices. If you want to better yourself and make better choices and help others, come to this class.

"When you see the look on people's face and receive the thank you's, you know you made a difference in their lives."

Before this class Hall said she had a nonchalant attitude.

"I didn't care how I felt. Afterward I wanted to go to college. I want to mature over the years and better myself, making better grades and good choices."

Samantha Miller, 15, said her experience in the class has been good.

"I've got to understand people better, to listen to what they have to say and their ideas," she said. "I understand that things we do that you wouldn't think would be community service really is, and that community service doesn't mean you have to clean up after everybody. It makes you feel good about yourself."

Miller's goal is to graduate as one of the top 20 students and go to college. She would like to study cosmetology.

Justice will not lead the ALAS class next year, but will continue to teach Spanish, raise her five children — one a student at Elsik — and pursue a master's degree.

As her students get ready to enter the 10th grade, Justice said she was amazed by what a cohesive group they've become.

"I never realized how service would bring a class together," she said. "(Even) they're surprised by how well they've gotten along."