

Sloppin

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As I slowly shuffled up McAlister Mall to check in for [Outreach Tulane](#) on the clear morning Saturday (Aug. 31), groggy and stiff from a short night's sleep, I was amazed to see a long line of civic-minded Tulanians happily chattering with surprising enthusiasm given that it was 7:50 a.m. on the first Saturday of the semester. The line, though it ran from the quad-side doors of the Lavin-Bernick Center to Drill Road, went fairly quickly, and I was eating donuts in the air conditioning in a snap.



Junior Benton Oliver, left, and other Tulane students paint the town green at Outreach Tulane on Saturday (Aug. 31). (Photo by Sally Asher)

Now in its 23rd year, Outreach Tulane is the largest service event held annually by Tulane University, organizing more than 1,000 students to volunteer with dozens of local nonprofit organizations at sites around the greater New Orleans area.

This year I was assigned to serve with Playbuild NOLA. According to Charlotte Jones, director of operations and programming with Playbuild, the organization “turns vacant spaces into outdoor playgrounds and classrooms, where children can learn about architecture, design, city planning and sustainability, and be exposed to career information and enrichment that they don't get in school.” Our Outreach crew assisted by cleaning the litter from a future play site in Central City and painting elements of the outdoor classroom fun colors.

The morning was hot and muggy, and I was hungry and dehydrated, but our student project leaders soothed my suffering with a cooler of water bottles, a trash bag of snacks, and the advice to “take breaks often.” After a briefing, we grabbed paint rollers and got to work.

Aside from the fun we had sloppin' paint and swappin' stories, the highlight of the experience was when Loving Four Baptist Tabernacle across the street offered us boxed lunches of smoked pork, red beans and rice, potato salad, corn bread and cake, in return for a prayer to the Lord, which just goes to show that if one takes the initiative to reach out and improve the community, the community may reach back.

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