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jersey's **helping hands**

College students are busy volunteers

BY MICHELE HOWE
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James Koehler and Kehinde Togun are students at Rutgers-Newark who are getting the most out of their college experiences, academically and through community service projects.

Koehler was initially recruited to play baseball at Mary Washington College in Virginia, but transferred to Rutgers-Newark in the middle of his freshman year to be closer to home, following a severe bout with Crohn's disease. A Middletown resident, he lives on the Newark campus.

Today, the honors college senior and economics major is carrying a 17-credit course load each semester and maintaining a 3.93 GPA. In addition, he volunteers with a number of community service projects, such as the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation in Shrewsbury, the Lincroft Little League and the Good Will Home and Mission in Newark, where he organized a clothing drive.

"My mother founded the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation as a way to keep retired racehorses from being slaughtered, and I've helped out doing whenever I could. Through the foundation the horses can live out their lives on farms or be used for therapeutic activities at youth correctional facilities," said Koehler, 22.

"Although I'm from a more suburban area, I've been living on campus and have seen people walking around Newark with nothing. I wanted to help so I got in touch with family and friends and collected clothes to give to people in need.

"I also enjoy coaching baseball

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because you can teach kids not only about the game, but about teamwork and how it fits into life. I can see baseball as always being a part of my life," he added.

Koehler's commitment to community service and academic achievement earned him a \$10,000 scholarship from Schering-Plough Corp. for his senior year. The Schering-Plough Foundation Scholarship is awarded to a full-time undergraduate student based on academic merit, character, community service and leadership.

After graduating from Rutgers-Newark this spring, he plans to attend graduate school. He would like to pursue a career in sports management as a agent representing professional athletes.

Kehinde Togun, a junior in Rutgers-Newark Honors College with a 3.75 GPA, is also committed to helping others.

He is pursuing his undergraduate degree in political science and economics and is a resident assistant in student housing. Togun helps lead Beyond Campus, a student activist network dedicated to reforming education and improving the quality of life in Newark, and serves as a teaching assistant. He has also volunteered at the Salvation Army.

"I was born in Nigeria and came here at age 11," said Togun, 21.

"My family lives in Orange and I stay on campus. This is my second semester as an RA (resident assistant) with 41 students on the floor. It's a responsibility I take as seriously as Beyond Campus or volunteering on World AIDS Day on campus to spread the word about HIV and AIDS," said Togun.

"I would also like to create a mentoring program with middle school students in order to give them guidance for the future. I would like to go to law school, earn a master's in public administration and run a nonprofit organization in the future. I'm not sure what the focus of it will be.

"It may be dedicated to working with inner-city children and helping to improve the education system that is available to them. Or it could involve addressing the AIDS crisis in Africa," he said.

Togun pointed out that his participation in those pursuits would not be possible without the financial support he has received through the privately funded Julia

O'Hara Scholarship. The \$5,000 scholarship, renewable annually, is awarded based on merit or need to a graduate of St. Benedict's Preparatory School in Newark. The funds are made available through a private endowment established by St. Benedict's alum and Rutgers Board of Governors member Gene O'Hara in memory of his mother.

"Having this scholarship frees me up to pursue the goals that I want. It allows me to be able to live on campus and participate in extracurricular activities. Many of the things that I do outside of class are where I have learned the most," he said.

"Kehinde is just a phenomenal kid, and James is ambitious and a wonderful guy. Along with our commitment to academic achievement, community service is one of the hallmarks of what we are trying to accomplish here, and they are great examples of both," said Edward Kirby, dean of the Rutgers-Newark Faculty of Arts and Sciences.



GEORGE MCNISH/THE STAR-LEDGER

Kehinde Togun, front, and James Koehler are active volunteers despite their full course loads at Rutgers-Newark.