Journal of Michael Covello ’02

It is seven o’clock in the morning and I am sitting in the back seat of our 15-passenger gold van. I am still somewhat tired but excited to be going. There are three vehicles traveling to North Carolina: the Silver Bullet, the Excursion, and the Gold. We are starting our travels from Konover and we end up in Tarboro, N.C., sometime 12 hours later. We will be traveling through Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Washington (D.C.), Maryland, and Virginia to get to North Carolina.

We arrived at the North Carolina National Guard Armory around 8:45 p.m. on Sunday, March 18, 2001. We unpacked and went inside to see that Dartmouth, Towson, Manchester, and Hope College would be staying with us. Our accommodations were a sleeping bag, pillow, and a soft concrete floor. We set up camp in the middle of the armory floor.

The coordinator of the Americore Collegiate Challenge, Matt, ran us through the orientation process. He explained that the town of Tarboro was flooded in 1999, two years ago, due to excessive rain and the fact that the area dam had to be released to keep from losing it. Parts of town, depending on how much they were above or below sea level, had been anywhere from 15 to 20 feet under water. Homes, businesses, and people were devastated by this natural disaster. There were approximately 40 to 50 people dead and around 150 who were still considered MIA [missing in action].

The first night, we rested and did some local food shopping at the Piggly Wiggly in town. Soon morning would come and we would be off to our site to see what this flood had done to the town. As we drove, I saw many homes stained by the waterline and Xed with orange spray paint, showing that they were abandoned. We finally got to our site. It was a local church, the Radicue Primitive Baptist Church, which was erected in October 1896.

At first sight, the church looked like its pride had been taken away from it. The paint was barely on it, and the inside was pretty hollow. Hartford and Hope College from Michigan were teamed together to help restore this historic landmark.

We started like every other day with a devotion, a prayer. The activities that went on all week were substantial. Over the next week our groups united and:

- Scraped the remaining paint off the outside.
- Tore up the subfloor inside; ripped nails, tacks, and staples out of the ceiling, walls, and historic wood.
- Troy (UHA) and Joel (Hope) wired…the back meeting [room].
- Patrice and Jeremiah (UHA) and Jim and Allen (CCSU) insulated the walls of the meeting room.

Service with a Smile

For the third year, University of Hartford students gave up a week of vacation in March to take part in Habitat for Humanity’s Alternative Spring Break program. The number of Hartford students participating in the program has tripled since 1999, thanks to the efforts of the University’s Center for Community Service.

This year, students traveled to Tarboro, N.C., to help rebuild a church that was damaged by flooding. Michael Covello ’02, a student in the Barney School of Business, chronicled the week’s experiences in a journal, which he shared with The Observer.
Kate and I (UHA) framed the doorway and wall to the all-access bathroom.

Kate, Emre, and Andy (UHA) framed a closet with door.

Joel and Ester (Hope) wired the entire main part of the church, with the help of Rocio (UHA) when the ceiling needed to be wired.

Christine, Diana, and Tini (UHA) Sheetrocked a small hallway.

Jessa and Jeanette (UHA) and others insulated the walls of the chancel, from where the clergy held services.

Antonio, Jen, and Rick (UHA) finished siding the meeting room.

Josh, Tara, and Kim (UHA) helped with plastering the meeting room.

These are just a few of the tasks that were done by the many people on the trip.

One of the major aspects of the restoration of the town of Tarboro was headed by the dashing duo of Megan and Justin (UHA), who helped the entire town by setting up their 911 system. It was critical that this system be done by the end of the week. Megan and Justin, along with the help of people from Hope College and others from UHA, went door to door for three or four days straight to get the correct information for the system. After a hard day of work, Megan and Justin would bring back the paperwork for the 911 system to work on it that night. They worked every day from the time they rose until the time they went to bed. The system was not fully complete by the time we left, so Megan and Justin took the work back to UHA to finish it and send it out ASAP.

So many worked so hard all week and enjoyed an experience that changed their lives. I know it changed mine. I learned a lot from the community, especially when so many smiling faces said thank you for coming down and helping. The people of Tarboro welcomed us like one of their own. This was a most heartwarming and uplifting experience. Like my good friend Patrice said, “It gave you a sense of completeness.” I wouldn’t have traded this experience for any beach or ocean in the world.