

Teamwork makes the dream work



By Greg Chandler

Bob Estochen pulled up in front of Wyckoff and Scott halls on the south side of Hope's campus in a rented truck, filled with belongings of his son, Sam, and two other incoming Hope students.

Within seconds, about 20 Hope students, wearing bright orange T-shirts, descended on Estochen's truck.

"Hi, welcome to Hope!" one of the students said. "Can we help you?"

Estochen knew the drill. Four years earlier, he had dropped off his daughter, Meghan Estochen '08 Smith, to begin her studies at Hope.

"Knowing this was going to greet us made me feel comfortable driving this truck," said Estochen, who had just finished driving 10 hours from his hometown of Marion, N.Y.

One after another, student orientation assistants grabbed a box or crate to carry out of Estochen's truck. Over the next 10 minutes, they carried Sam's belongings to his room in Wyckoff, as well as those belonging to Tori Williams and Amanda VanderByl, who are also from New York State.

For students new to Hope, the greeting marks the start of orientation weekend, an intensive four-day period that introduces them to college life and what they can expect at Hope.

Small-group discussion and activities across Orientation Weekend help new students get acquainted with both each other and their new Hope College home. The sessions are led by upperclassmen like Rachel Bakken and Diego Romero (orange shirts in the photo above), for whom giving back by helping the newest generation of students is a priority.

"This weekend gives the freshman a chance to get acquainted with the campus and some of the Hope students without being overwhelmed by everyone moving in," said Diego Romero, a senior from Holland, Mich., who served as one of the orientation assistants. "It gives them a chance to define Hope for themselves."

Dr. Richard Frost, vice president of student development and dean of students, considers orientation a crucial part of a student's experience at the college.

"I think it's one of the essential steps of providing that transition to students of what we are academically, what they can expect personally, and how we engage the Christian faith," Dr. Frost said.

Students play a leading role in creating the orientation program, with two seniors, Doug Fujawa of Schoolcraft, Mich., and Anna Finger of Anderson, Ind. serving as the program's directors.

"I know how tough it can be to come to college, both for the new student and their families," Fujawa said. "I wanted to be a part of the process that eased their nerves and left them feeling comfortable with where they

were sending their son or daughter."

Rachel Bakken, a senior from Golden, Colo., recalled her experience going through orientation as a freshman and how it shaped her decision to become an orientation assistant. She credits the assistants she had for making her feel welcome and accepted from the outset.

"They were friendly, cared for my group, and really wanted the best transition for us," Bakken said. "I just hope I am that OA for the new students in our group and all the new students and parents I talk to."

"When I participate in orientation as a leader, we are continuing one of the great Hope traditions and passing on our love of Hope College to the new students."

– Rachel Bakken '09

The next morning, students gather in the DeWitt Center for a seminar on deciding on a major and choosing a career direction, a discussion that is led by representatives from the CrossRoads Project and Hope's Career Center. Academic interest sessions are held for students thinking about careers in education, pre-law, health, nursing, engineering and the arts.

"We are trying to set the tone right away (of what our expectations are), so there's not a lot of confusion as to why they're here," Dr. Frost said.

In the early afternoon, students meet with their orientation assistants – usually two assistants for each team of about 10 incoming students. Bakken and Romero are working together and have their group meet in the Pine Grove area, between VanderWerf Hall and the Schaap Science Center. Bakken and Romero each wear #11 on their T-shirts, signifying their group number, so that students can easily locate them.

The group plays several games, including one in which each of the students takes a colored Skittle candy and describes something about themselves. For example, if a student is handed a red Skittle, he or she has to describe something they're passionate about.

The students also talk about what community means to them, and the assistants also talk about the significance of community in the life of Hope.

"You're going to notice that it's a very bonded community," Romero tells students. "It's up to you to create the community you want."

The assistants also address some heavier issues, such as Hope's policy on alcohol, during the three-hour group session. Afterward, it's on to the First-Year Seminar Class, where students meet their academic advisors for the first time.

Later, it's on to the Dow Center for Playfair, a series of interactive games designed to get students to know each other, followed by a luau in the parking lot of the DePree Art Center.

"It gets them out there and helps them meet new people," Romero said. "It keeps them aware that there's stuff to do, and not just hang out in your own room."

Sunday brings the first worship service at Dimnent Chapel, followed by the opening convocation at DeVos Fieldhouse. Sam Estochen says he was hooked on Hope's chapel program very quickly.

"It reminds me of my youth group (from high school), with the worship band," Estochen said. "It's a great feeling."

On Monday, students meet with their advisors individually and discuss their classes. They also can attend a job fair at the Dow Center to learn about on-campus employment. That night, there's an activities fair where students can learn about serving in student government or get involved in a particular organization.

"At college, you need to be a participant in the life of the college from day one," Dr. Frost said. "We don't expect you to be a spectator, but an engaged member of our community."

Sam Estochen credits orientation for helping him adjust quickly to life as a college student. "I know a lot more people than I would have at this point had I not gone through it," he said.



Diego Romero and Rachel Bakken were among the more than 150 upperclassmen who make Move-In Day a breeze for the college's new students by descending en masse on each arriving vehicle and quickly bringing its contents to the student's awaiting room.

