

Callie Weber Compassionate Leader



Callie Weber. Courtesy Photo

BY JONATHAN KANE

Callie Weber, a Wood River High School senior carrying a 3.97 grade point average, is a member of the Compassionate Young Leaders organization and last year traveled to India with a group of other students to do service and spread compassion to those less fortunate.

At Wood River, Weber has a very busy schedule, being president of the Model UN, serving on the Wood River Land Trust Student Conservation Council and by being a member of National Honor Society. She has also taken several Advanced Placement courses including Language and Composition, U.S. History, Calculus A & B, Biology and Psychology.

But it was her trip to India that had the most profound effect on her. Compassionate Young Leaders is dedicated to teaching mental balance, or being aware of what you are doing and being able to handle your emotions and compassion.

"Nine kids went to India," she said, "and before that we would meet once a week on Tuesday evenings discussing community service opportunities and how to fundraise and do a 20-minute mindfulness practice, which is like a meditation, but there is no religious connotation.

"We also read books about compassion and happiness, like the Dalai Lama's 'Beyond Religion,' which talked about the difference between happiness and pleasure, which we have a tough time distinguishing between in the West and that bad emotions need not be destructive.

"We also read 'Happiness,' by Matthieu Ricard, which covered many of the same topics. They were both really cool and they talked about things that we hadn't been exposed to before.

All these teachings are secular and are a way to improve your spiritual/mindfulness practice. At first I didn't understand it but now I'm really into it. You develop a calm mind and become aware of your body so that wherever you go or whatever you do you are in the moment. You learn to be present and not worried about the past or the future."

Weber's trip to India took place from June 26 to July 21 of last year and started in Delhi for two days before traveling on to Ladok.

"Delhi was so hot and humid and crowded and the caste system was really apparent there. We stayed in a neighborhood by the Embassy that was walled off for the wealthy and people were outside living on the streets. It was really insane.

"In Ladok we did service by working at a festival orga-

nized by the Dalai Lama and where he spoke every day. There were 150,000 people there and we were assigned to assist with the elderly. We would walk them from the gate to their seats, serve them tea and water and bread and help them in any way that we could. We also brought trash bags with us and spent two hours every night cleaning the grounds.

"The Dalai Lama gave teachings every day and there were a lot of prayer sessions. His house was at the back of the grounds and every morning he would walk the street lined by thousands of people with scarves to be blessed. His presence was amazing and so intense. It was amazing because one time we were in the front row and he smiled and waved at us. It was also amazing to see that many people gathered to make themselves better human beings."

What did Weber take out of the experience? "The most important part was that so many people share a spiritual belief and put their faith into one thing. That's not something you see generally in America. It was also a shock to see Indian culture, and really impressive. They have so little yet they are so happy and content. In America, we don't really feel that's possible."

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