

WINGS' survival training

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News staff writer

It is difficult to tell that the three young men lounging comfortably around the living room at their shared Rockford Road home aren't brothers — or that they were homeless not so long ago.

Jaysen Love, 21, Stephen Sanchez, 19, and Logan Anderson, 18, spend their lunch break on a rainy day engaged in the good-natured jesting that is common to males of their age group.

Meanwhile, their soggy gloves and soaked boots have been neatly laid out on the hearth in preparation for that afternoon's labor on a nearby farm.

"It's hard to get your stuff together when you don't have a home," said Love during a serious moment.

"Being here has been great; we really appreciate all of the support that we are getting."

Not only are landscaping and other employment opportunities provided to the three men by local businesses and residents, but



Photo by Adam Lapierre

WINGS MEN show off table etiquette learned during their stay at a transitional home. Featured from left are resident Jaysen Love, program director Shawn Bergman, resident Stephen Sanchez, graduate Daren Starwing and resident Logan Anderson.

home-cooked foods are also an added benefit of many jobs.

"Everyone always wants to feed these guys," said Allyson Pate, WINGS founder and director.

"Not only that, but every place that they work we seem to pick up a new supporter."

Sanchez, Love and Anderson contend that their fan club is growing because of their suave personalities — especially since they now exhibit excellent table manners and know how to treat women "like the Queen of England" on an out-

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ing.

"You are all going to really stand out when you are out there," reaffirms Pate, who is often the beneficiary of the lessons in decorum.

Charm aside, Shawn Bergman, program director, insists that it is the strong work ethic shown by WINGS men that is winning hearts and minds in the community.

"The cool thing about the jobs that we get is that they are so random and varied that we learn a little bit of everything," said Sanchez.

"You see that there is a real need for people who can work and figure things out."

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Meet the men

Jaysen Love, 21, is considered the "Brawn" of the current WINGS family group and is admired by his peers for his feats of physical strength. He has not yet decided on a career and plans to take college courses of interest until he finds the perfect fit.

Stephen Sanchez, 19, has been named the "Brain" of the household because of his strong mathematical abilities and attention to detail. He is the "go-to guy" on the job when there is a challenge to overcome and hopes to one day to be a physics teacher.

Logan Anderson, 18, objects to being called the "Beauty" of the group because that term is not macho enough. However, he is the resident artist and the best chef in the crew; everyone looks forward to the meals that are created on his watch. His plan is to become a licensed tattoo artist and he is already working on ink designs.

Daryn Starwing, 23, is the first Phase I graduate of the WINGS program. He now resides independently and is planning to either design video games or become a high school music teacher.

Shawn Bergman is the program director for WINGS and the "house parent" at the Rockford residence. He is an avid outdoorsman who works alongside the men and is teaching them everything from cooking to auto repair.

WINGS

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The name WINGS is short for the program's motto, "When they are ready, we will give them Wings." The Rockford home opened in December 2008 with a mission to prevent young men ages 18-23 from "falling through the cracks" by providing them with a stable environment to learn life skills.

Drug and alcohol use is strictly prohibited and can result in an immediate dismissal from the program.

Love said coffee is the best way to start a day that has been planned by Bergman since it will include a packed schedule. Not only is there a job that helps pay the \$5,700 in monthly bills for the program, but there are also home chores and schoolwork to be completed.

In addition, the crew performs a half day of community service each week, such as making bread runs for FISH food bank and La Clínica del Cariño.

"Our goal is to give these young men the confidence and the skills that they need to reach their full potential," said Pate.

Bergman serves as the "house parent" and works alongside Anderson, Love and Sanchez to ensure they are doing any job well. He also provides instruction in the kitchen — everybody has assigned nights to cook — as well as the proper use of tools for building and auto mechanics.

"We all get along pretty well, so that makes it enjoyable to live here," said Anderson.

To graduate from Phase I of the program, where direct supervision takes place, the men must complete 12 steps that hone their ability to sustain interpersonal and pro-

fessional relationships. A portion of their earnings are placed in a savings account to meet future needs.

Once launched on their own in Phase II, typically after about nine months, the men are assisted in obtaining employment, housing and an education. Money from the individual's savings account can be accessed for these needs but withdrawals must be approved by WINGS' officials.

"By the time these guys graduate out of the program, they are able to live independently and take care of themselves," said Bergman.

But work is not all WINGS has to offer; recreation last summer included whitewater rafting and, if snowboards become available, there will be plenty of play time on the mountain this winter.

"Anyone who enters this program is always going to be part of the WINGS family and be invited back for holiday dinners and other events," said Pate.

Daren Starwing, formerly Marvin, is the first WINGS graduate and is now mentoring his three "younger brothers." He lives in a nearby residence with three roommates and is working for Pate as the WINGS' program assistant.

Starwing is a self-avowed gourmet chef and guitar player who volunteers at Soul Café and is planning on either designing video games or teaching music at the high school level.

"Before WINGS I was scared to get into a real solid work environment because I didn't know what was ex-

WINGS BENEFIT HOEDOWN

A hoe-down to benefit WINGS' programs will take place Saturday and anyone looking for a good time is invited.

Barbecue ribs will be served at Mt. Hood Town Hall, 6575 Highway 35, beginning at 6:30 p.m. Nov. 14. A no-host wine and beer bar will also be available. During the three-and-a-half-hour event, the band Larkspur will provide dancing music. Entertainment during the evening will also include Texas Hold'em card games. The cost to attend is \$50 (\$30 is tax-deductible). Tickets can be purchased at Waucoma Bookstore and Small Planet Trading in Hood River.

Tickets can also be obtained online at www.getwings.net or by calling Allyson Pate, WINGS director, at 541-380-3820. The Web site provides information about ways that community members unable to attend the barbecue can support the program that teaches life and job skills to young adult males.

pected for an employee and I was afraid of failure," said Starwing, 23, who spent much of his childhood in foster care.

"I have always had trouble getting into things unless I have someone to show me and WINGS gave me that. I am not afraid to go out there and look now."

Pate said the guys at WINGS are encouraged to spend every other weekend with their families to heal broken relationships.

She said it has proven challenging to find motivated applicants for the program. She said several men have already dropped out due to an inability to deal with the rigid structure of life at the Rockford home.

She said there is currently an opening for a fourth man

in the program and a second facility could open by next year to accommodate an additional four guests.

Pate said a snow blower was donated to the WINGS program and the guys hope to be hired to clear driveways, etc., this winter. She said work opportunities and cash contributions are continually needed to pay the bills that keep the transitional home in operation.

In addition to snowboards, Bergman is seeking donations of four mountain bikes in any condition, camping/backpacking gear, rock climbing equipment and wet-suits.

To make a contribution or learn more about WINGS, visit www.getwings.net or call Pate at 541-380-3820.