**Paying It Forward**

When asked what excited her most about offering opportunities to Whitman students, Anne Marie Schwerin ’85, executive director of the YWCA of Walla Walla said, “Isn’t it the way it’s supposed to be. I had all these great helping hands when I was a student here and a young person in town. That is my responsibility, and its super fun because through reaching out to Whitman students we get way more than we give. I think it’s an uneven blessing.”

The idea of giving back by investing in others has been explored through art in novels like “Pay It Forward” or movies like “Seven Pounds,” but the concept of paying it forward is a creed that has been woven into the fabric of the Whitman experience since the college’s founding in 1859.

**Each One Teach One**

When Schwerin transferred to Whitman as a junior, she found more than just a place to earn a degree; she discovered a community that was devoted to broadening a student’s approach to society.

“The number one benefit of a liberal arts education is it should open you up to the world and your heart as well, and Whitman does that better than any other place I’ve ever been,” she said. “It’s the spirit of this college, and I carry it with me.”

Schwerin credited Whitman’s commitment to turning out leaders with open minds, open hearts and the willingness to be adventurous with assisting her in making the decision to take the role of executive director of the YWCA. It’s also one of the primary reasons why she extends a hand back into the Whitman community when creating partnerships that allow Whitman students an opportunity to intern with the YWCA.

Sociology and French major Maeve McCracken ’19 is a Whittie who has received a helping hand from Schwerin.

McCracken assists Jessica Matthews, the YWCA’s Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Advocate on campus. Whether it’s shadowing Matthews at her office at Hunter or at the women’s shelter, McCracken is learning skills that she can apply directly after graduation while providing aide to those in Walla Walla who are at risk.

“After going through training, being able to sort of be in the field, and actively participate in shadowing – I’ve learned a lot of different ways to respond to situations – how to listen actively to clients and be compassionate,” she said.

McCracken hopes to work in education policy after graduation. The most important lesson she’s learned from her internship has been the understanding that people can begin from very different places in life. The most crucial thing is to provide them with the resources to get them where they need to be, she said.

Along with shadowing Matthews, McCracken also learns from other advocates by accompanying them to court each Friday when the judge hears dockets for sexual assault and domestic violence cases.

**Expanding the Bubble**

One of the unexpected benefits of Whitman’s internship program is that students begin to integrate themselves into Walla Walla on a personal level and extend themselves past the college’s campus.

When Schwerin was a senior, the “Whitman bubble” was more than a perception.

“I remember when I moved off campus, I lived on Birch. I had a group of friends who had dinner at one another’s apartments, and there were students in my friend group who weren’t sure how to get to Birch Street. So, the Whitman bubble was real, it was tight,” she said.

Today the Whitman bubble has spread into Walla Walla mainly because of the students’ zeal to want to give back to the community.

“We didn’t have a community service program like this. If you did something, it was something you kind of put together as a side gig somewhere,” Schwerin said, “I see a huge difference in the students now. They’re all over the community. Now it’s like expected and not just by the administration, but by the students. It’s like yeah, I’m going to do my community service. It’s huge.”

As much as Schwerin finds excitement in working with Whitman students and providing a pathway into Walla Walla, McCracken finds the opportunity to leave Whitman’s campus and engage with the community equally rewarding.

“I think when provided with these opportunities to go into a community organization, students are given a skill set with which to build on,” McCracken said. “It’s a very reciprocal sort of process. Students have the benefit of going out and giving back to the community that we live in, and community partners like the YWCA benefit from having fresh, new, curious minds come in and bring different ideas.”