A mother watches on as her child gets an inkprint for an ID packet Saturday afternoon in the Student Center lobby. This was for Project Kidcare, which was sponsored by the Campus Police.

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Project America Aims For Community Spirit

By Jung Yoon Choi

Boston is one of many cities to take part in Saturday's Project America, a nationwide effort to promote community service, according to event co-founder Jerey E. Ramer '93.

The event will kick off at 10 a.m. in Faneuil Hall, which is the courtyard between the main building and Building 18, with a short speech by former Massachusetts Governor Michael S. Dukakis, said Michael H. Joo '95, one of the Project America Northeast regional directors. Students are invited to come hear Dukakis speak, Joo said.

"The goal of Project America is not just a one-day event of helping the community," said Interfraternity Council Philanthropy Chair Michael J. Negrete '96, who has been actively planning Boston's Project America events. "The goal is to have the participants get a different perspective on their community, to better understand what the heroes and the senior citizens are experiencing," he said.

"The event is open to anybody interested in helping out the Boston community," Ramer said. Students from MIT, Harvard University, Boston University, Wellesley College, and Tufts University will be participating, he said. "We're looking at as few hundreds to attend the kickoff, but over 1,000 people to participate at over 50 sites in the Boston area," Joo said.

Though people have preregistered to participate in the service events, others can still register Saturday morning, Joo said.

Project America participants will take part in various community service on Saturday, such as serving lunch at homeless shelters and performing basic maintenance projects at nursing homes, Negrete said.

Project began as a simple idea

Timothy Fazio, a student at Penn State, and a former high school classmate of Ramer, and Joseph Kohli, also of Penn State, are the other two founders of the nationwide project.

Ramer said that they first came up with the idea for Project America as seniors in high school. Fazio wanted to have a day dedicated to solving the nation's problems, Ramer said.

The idea developed into a cleanup day in their community, Ramer said. "I wanted people to help people," Ramer said.

Ramer continued to promote the idea of Project America after he arrived at MIT. A note he posted in his fraternity's national newsletter stating his interest in a nationwide community project led to a meeting between Ramer and a chief executive officer of Merrill Lynch Company, he said.

Merrill Lynch decided to give $15,000 in seed money to Project America, Ramer said. At this point Ramer, Fazio, and Kohli decided to take some time off from college to focus on putting the project together, Ramer said.

Over the next year, they received the support of over 150 national organizations, Ramer said. BOKS, a division of Reebok, funded Project America's handbook, which contains over 50 ideas for community projects, he said. Project America also had an 1-800 number donated to it, he said.

Thousands of people across the nation will combine efforts to improve the welfare of various communities, Ramer said.

Currently, Project America has over 5,000 project leaders at 100 schools and in cities as far away as Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, as well as throughout the continental United States, Ramer said.

Boston is the only city where the project is college student oriented, Ramer said. The other cities have people of all ages participating, he said.

Christine J. Sasso is the other Project America Northeast regional director.

Ramzy A. Arnaout '96 contributed to the reporting of this story.

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