

Student inspired to help Gulf Coast **The Nevada Sagebrush, By Nicole Brown**

When Penny Pritchard, a 21-year-old health ecology major, wrote about poverty for a class a few semesters ago, she said her lack of a solution troubled her.

"I've had an interest in poverty for a very long time," she said.

But she said a lecture by San Jose State University professor Scott Myers-Lipton Thursday planted a seed in her mind – she'd join his **Gulf Coast Civic Works Project** to help relieve poverty in the Gulf Coast. She said she'd then spearhead a club at the University of Nevada, Reno to raise awareness for the project and possibly petition the U.S. Congress in September to write legislation creating community service jobs for Gulf Coast residents.

The other university chapters of Myers-Lipton's project help lobby for change by getting signatures for the petition, creating stimulating visuals to raise awareness about the project, Myers-Lipton said. He said they'll also try to contact their local state legislators to try to raise awareness and back the project when the group visits Washington, D.C., in September.

Myers-Lipton said he contacted one of the senators in California, who said if other senators get involved, she will too.

Myers-Lipton suggested students interested in helping with the project should exchange information and start mobilizing. Eight students stayed after Myers-Lipton's presentation to start brainstorming ideas.

So far, the UNR students have printed a few petitions from solvingpoverty.com, the Web site for Myers-Lipton's project, to pass around, and they plan to use gathered signatures to help lobby Congress to create civic work opportunities for Gulf Coast residents.

After the UNR students get the signatures, they said they will send them to Myers-Lipton and he will add them to the other universities' signatures on his master list. Once the master list reaches its goal of 100,000 names, the Web site will post that 100,000 civic works projects can be created, according to solvingpoverty.com.

The UNR group said they will also create cardboard tombstones with the names of the Hurricane Katrina victims. The tombstones would be displayed on campus to show the number of people who died in the disaster, they said. The group said they focus around the Katrina victims because Mississippi and Louisiana were two of the poorest states in the U.S. The disaster just raised awareness of the amount of poverty in these areas, Pritchard said.

Pritchard suggested that all students at UNR write letters to Sen. Harry Reid to ask for money to implement the program.

Myers-Lipton said the UNR group should ask their professors for two minutes at the start of class to help get signatures for the petition. He said San Jose State University students received about 600 signatures so far using this method.

Myer-Lipton said the problem of poverty will take a long time to remedy, but with people working together it can happen.

"Change is hard, but possible," he said during his presentation.