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YLakeland is a new college resource

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Local site, YLakeland.com, was developed by college students in collaboration with the Lakeland Economic Development Council (LEDC) to promote local activities and combat homesickness by encouraging student involvement in the community.

According to a poll conducted in 2009 by the Associated Press, 42 percent of college students expressed feelings of hopelessness and 13 percent exhibited signs of depression--statistics many psychiatrists believe can be attributed to homesickness.

Josh Nederveld, University of Florida alumnus, interns for the YLakeland website.

"There are activities going on every weekend here," Nederveld said.

YLakeland as well as the LEDC believe that getting involved helps combat obstacles such as homesickness.

Since the website's start, YLakeland has provided local college students with the information needed to get involved in the community. The website features reviews, a daily-updated blog and more all from real college students for college students.

"You can find all kinds of information about the city on our site. There are full archives as well as informations about activities, shopping, restaurants and work opportunities," Nederveld said.

On the website, each tab is broken down into different categories. For example, the restaurants are broken down into the types of food such as American, Chinese, Cuban, Greek, Italian, Japanese Mexican and Thai. Also, students can search for their preferred restaurant type such as bakeries, cafes, coffee houses, steakhouses, delicatessens, fine dining and casual dining.

Under the work tab, students can find internships and service opportunities. Organizations include Big Brothers Big Sisters, Lakeland Habitat for Humanity and Lighthouse Ministries.

Recalling a comment posted on YLakeland's Facebook page, Nederveld regretted that some students felt like there is nothing to do in Lakeland.

"My job is basically to spend time researching and discovering what there is to do here," Nederveld said.

Being both a college graduate and Lakeland native, it would seem that few are better qualified to elicit advice on the subject.

"I've lived in this town for as long as I can remember. Sure, [Lakeland] might not be too much to talk about in comparison to Tampa or Orlando...and there are a lot of things to do there. But I choose to live here," Nederveld replied.

As Nederveld wrote on his blog, "Lakeland is a town that tried to give college students what they need, [which is] a community that cares about its college students and wants to see them develop."

For this reason, YLakeland worked with LEDC to create an eight-week summer leadership program for interns and new hires.

The program began in the summer of 2008 and, like the website, has worked to connect college students and young professionals to Lakeland and to each other.

"I think that there is a lot of opportunity [in Lakeland] for students looking for a unique experience," Nederveld said.

YLakeland also encourages college students to get involved on its website by participating and following their blog.

"We welcome all ideas," Nederveld said.

Students can get connected with YLakeland through their Facebook page, Twitter account, website at www.ylakeland.com or by emailing Nederveld at jnederveld@lakeland.com.