

Campers provide fresh coat of energy to village painting project

Teenagers volunteer as part of retired native's plan to brush away the blight in Glouster

By [Lori Kurtzman](#)

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GLOUSTER, Ohio — They were everywhere yesterday, scraping and staining and power-washing and painting, a whirlwind of brushes and rollers whipping this Athens County village into shape.

The kids in blue had invaded. Hundreds of them.

Residents drove slowly through the streets. Some stopped to take pictures. Children stared wide-eyed through windows as teenage strangers on their porch painted the railings a crisp white.

Somewhere in the middle of all of this was a man whose little idea transformed a village, an 81-year-old Glouster native who couldn't stand seeing his hometown look so run down and decided to do something about it.

"I love it," said Jim Cotter, pausing for just a moment in a warehouse that quickly was being emptied of donated paint cans and stir sticks. "I'm having the best time of my life."

A lot has happened since Cotter, a retired Dayton-area sign-maker, and his band of volunteers [first took a brush to the blight in this ailing, 1,800-resident village](#). No fewer than 55 painting projects have been completed since spring, everything from Bonnie's Home Cooking downtown to the high-school stadium down the road. Cotter's project caught so much attention that a crew from CBS News came out to do a story on it, and little old Glouster was beamed into homes across the country.

And then reinforcements arrived by the blue-shirted busload.

The teenage volunteers were career- and technical-education students, 260 participants of a SkillsUSA leadership camp at nearby Hocking College. Campers do a community-service project every year, and this time they chose Glouster. They rolled into town yesterday morning and made quick work of 17 projects on six streets, mixing paint with sweat in the sweltering weather.

At a home on New Street — where the owner introduced himself as "Porkchop" — three 17-year-olds from Eastland Career Center in Groveport glossed over the mossy-green

bricks of the building's foundation. As they paused to let the paint dry, Arielle Gray described the project the same way a kid painting a porch over on Madison Street did: "It's awesome," she said. "It feels so good to help people."

One of those people was Kathy Bick, of Braun Street. Displaying a level of bravery not often seen, Bick, 60, let the volunteers pick the color of her house. What once was white became a lemony yellow. Wouldn't have been her first choice, but Bick seemed happy.

"I love it already," she said, jumping up and down a little. "Yellow is the sun."

Rootie Covelle, 80, one of the volunteers who drove Cotter around yesterday, sat behind the wheel of her golf cart and just soaked in what was happening to her town. It seemed to have doubled in size, with all of these paint-streaked kids popping in, grabbing a few brushes, changing a bunch of lives.

Locals may be getting used to all the painting going on in Gloucester, but this was special, Covelle said. In the 90-degree heat, it gave her the chills.

lkurtzman@dispatch.com

[@LoriKurtzman](#)