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I moved to Lewiston/Auburn last summer, just as my senior year of high school began. Since I am a newcomer to L-A, I haven't really had a chance to discover a place of my own. So instead, I'd like to share with you what I have learned about this community through quiet observation in my first few months here. This is how I discovered what great "twin cities" I live in.

In my AP Biology class, I recently learned about fungi. One phrase in the book caught my eye. "In most lichens that have been studied, each partner provides something the other could not obtain on its own." As I thought about this idea of interdependence, I realized that it doesn't just apply to lichen; it applies to the human population as well. We each contribute a little piece to society, and, together, our pieces make a whole. I have found that this especially applies to Lewiston/Auburn, Maine.

From my very first day in Maine, I have experienced nothing but courtesy and respect from the people I have met. Something as simple as holding the door for me as I ran into Kohl's to escape a rain shower, shows that people care. One night after a basketball game, I came out to my car to find a team mate and her father waiting for me. They had noticed that my car dome light was on and, worried that my car might not start, waited to see if I might need some help. These small, but kind acts may not seem significant to you, but to me they mean that the people of L-A care about each other. It feels good to know that someone is always looking out for me.

The people I have met and gotten to know since my arrival in L-A are very generous people. Each person is more than willing to donate time and energy for the benefit of others. It seems to me that everyone is aware of their talents and they know when others need their help. At school, I am a member of Mission Mississippi. We are a group of seniors that will take a two

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week trip this spring to volunteer in a low-income community. We have funded our trip with money we have raised ourselves by collecting returnable bottles, selling pizza kits and cookie dough, and holding a pancake breakfast. For the past seven months, I have been asking for people's support through the donation of empty bottles to return or the purchase of fundraiser items. But what has impressed me the most is the number of people who sought me out in an effort to donate to the trip. I have received hundreds of bottles to return, unsolicited. You will not meet a more generous and helpful group of people.

The willingness of community members to volunteer for various functions is a truly defining characteristic. As a volunteer basketball instructor for the YMCA's fall youth basketball program, I was pleasantly surprised to discover just how many people volunteered their time to work with the kids. And they don't just volunteer at the YMCA. From the compiling of holiday gift baskets for the needy, to sharing a moment with a child visiting Santa Claus at Wal-Mart, to running an after-school tutoring program staffed by high school students, the people I have met in Lewiston/Auburn obviously recognize and appreciate the positive effects of volunteer efforts, and each person gives back to the community in his or her own way.

It is through this quiet observation of the people around me that I believe I have found the greatest asset of Lewiston/Auburn, Maine. It isn't a statue, or a building, or restaurant, but rather the men and women the statue might represent, the contractors who constructed the unique building, and the wonderful people in the restaurant booth next to me. As with lichens, interdependence supports the life of the community. It is apparent that the most outstanding quality of L-A is the people who live here, the people who have created these great cities and the wonderful life one can live here.

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<sup>1</sup> Campbell, Neil A., and Jane B. Reece. Biology. 7th ed. San Francisco, Boston, New York: Pearson Inc.: Benjamin Cummings, 2005. 621.