

AmeriCorps: Getting things done

By Zachary Dreher and Ashley Esslinger

Getting things done. That is the primary goal of the AmeriCorps program according to the AmeriCorps Member Manual. This program brings many different people in their communities together, and utilizes them to improve and strengthen their communities. AmeriCorps not only brings a large variety of people together to better their communities, it also teaches responsibility. The sense of responsibility that is taught is not only for the person's job, but also for the individual's family, friends, and community.

One of the biggest draws to the AmeriCorps program is that not only do the individuals get paid a stipend every two weeks, they also receive an educational award should they meet the required hours of their contract.

In the program's first year (1994-1995) the AmeriCorps members in just the environmental projects preformed the following project collectively: flood recovery work on 75,300 acres, constructed or maintained 715 miles of trails, improved 6,176 acres of wildlife habitat, provided 885 land owners with water quality assistance, built or repaired 76 campground areas, planted 10,400 trees, made 42 recreation sites for the disabled, restored 760 acres of fisheries habitat, and protected 67,483 acres of coastal land.

Nine years after AmeriCorps was launched in 1994, there were 150,000 Americans that served on the front lines in hard-pressed neighborhoods, tutoring in schools, responding to natural disasters, helping to make our world safer, building homes, and more.

As Millard Fuller, the Founder of Habitat for Humanity said, "Hundreds of hard-working young people have worked with Habitat for Humanity all across the United States over

the past several years as part of AmeriCorps. And the impact of those AmeriCorps workers grows stronger year after year."

In the 1997-98 program year, there were more than 40,000 members serving in all of the AmeriCorps programs, with approximately 15,000 of those in the Education Awards Program.

There are currently two AmeriCorps members working at the Prairie Dog State Park, located four miles west of Norton, this summer.

First term member Ashley Esslinger and second term member Zachary Dreher have been helping out at the state park throughout the winter and will continue until late July or early August.

When Ashley was asked why she decided to work through the AmeriCorps she replied "The main reason I chose to work through AmeriCorps is because it would be a new experience and getting to go do disaster relief would be a very good experience also."

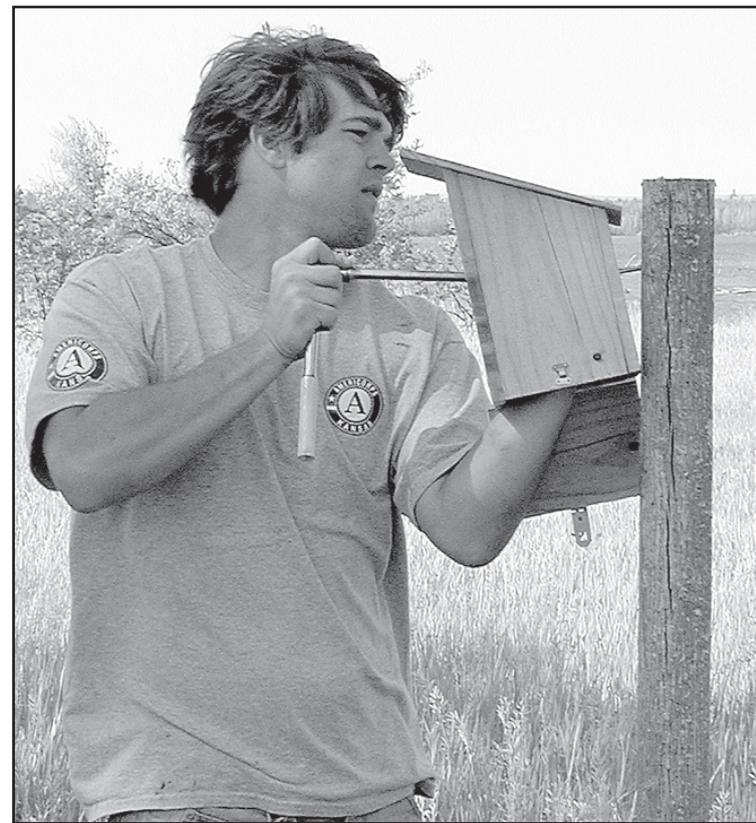
She was also asked what her duties during the winter months. "I scooped snow off of the sidewalks around the park, cleaned the cabins, checked the water pipes running to our news cabins to make sure that they did not freeze, loaded shoreline debris with the tractor, made bird boxes, helping out in the office, and working on my AmeriCorps class."

Second term worker Zachary Dreher split time between Tuttle Creek State Park in Manhattan and Prairie Dog State Park. When asked about the experience of working at two different state parks he said "Working at the two parks was a good experience, but I'd have to say that our park here is one of the best in the state."

He was also asked why he decided to take a second term. "One of the main reasons I decided to do

another term is because of the educational grant that I will receive is a great help to me while I'm attending Kansas State University."

Even with all of the state budget cuts, the AmeriCorps program has allowed the park to maintain an adequate maintenance staff. This program is very important to Prairie Dog State Park and we take pride in all that we have accomplished.



First year AmeriCorps worker Ashley Esslinger, to the left, tends to the newly planted trees around the new cabins. Zachary Dreher, above, is a second year AmeriCorps worker. He is seen here putting up one of several blue bird houses that can be found throughout the park. As a park employee there are several jobs that need completion, including watering, mowing, painting, weed trimming, repairs and maintenance.

— Telegram photos by Dana Paxton



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