What is AmeriCorps?
by Kate Pyron

“If I had a penny for every time I was asked that question, I would be rich.” That is what I thought as soon as I received this assignment. So what is AmeriCorps? The definition of AmeriCorps is a national service program that gives Americans the chance to give back to their community and country. In 1993, former President Bill Clinton and Congress signed a bill that brought AmeriCorps into action. For years before there had been various national service programs, one of which was even responsible for the national parks enjoyed by many people today.

Following September 11th, there has been an influx of people interested in serving their country. AmeriCorps is just one way they can do that. AmeriCorps members work in their local community to help with projects such as building homes for the needy (Habitat for Humanity), assisting not-for-profit organizations, helping with collaborations such as Feed the Children, and working within the schools to help children learn to read, gain confidence in themselves, and better the community through volunteerism. AmeriCorps is made up of three branches: AmeriCorps*State and National, AmeriCorps* VISTA, and AmeriCorps Civilian Community Corps.

The program familiar to the Sauk Valley Community, and the program of which I am a member, is the AmeriCorps Benefits Children (ABC) Literacy Program. The ABC Literacy program is sponsored by Sauk Valley Community College. The Program Director is Rebecca White, with Tammy Brinkmeier serving as Program Assistant. Four years ago Mrs. White wrote a grant that brought the AmeriCorps program to our area. It is because of her long term commitment and love for the program that the ABC Literacy Program is here today.

This year the program is made up of fifteen full-time members. Full-time members mean that they must complete 1700 hours of service by the end of the term, which goes from September 2nd to July 31st. In return for their service members receive a small living allowance, and upon successful completion, an education award to use toward future education or a previous student loan. Members receive about two weeks of training before being assigned a site, and then continuous training throughout the year.

While in service members, are assigned a site usually at a school, daycare facility, or teen mentoring site, where they are placed for the entire term of service. At these sites members assist with reading, and teaching children the fundamentals of reading. Beyond the site, members assist in many volunteer programs such as library programs, Summer Youth Programs, after-school programs, or mentoring at Teen Turf in Amboy or Teen Action Zone in Sterling, just to name a few. Part-time, quarter-time, and work-study positions are usually available, however this year those options could not be offered.

In conclusion, I feel that the best answer to “What is AmeriCorps in the Sauk Valley area?” would be. “A group of men and women volunteering within and without the schools who are dedicated to helping children discover, learn, understand, and enjoy reading.”

Committees for 2003/2004
by Kathy Raymond

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Opening Day Ceremony
by Kate Pyron

Opening Day Ceremony was held this year on October 20 in Bloomington, IL.
The day began with registration, and then an opening session while we were treated to a very nice lunch. The keynote speaker was Laura A Cornille-Cannady. She is a well traveled and highly sought after speaker. Laura was very inspirational, and used her background to relate to her audience. Laura is a graduate of Quincy College and Illinois State University. She has a degree in Psychology, and runs her own training and consulting business. One thing I found admirable about her is that she also is the founder of a not-for-profit organization, Wear to Work, which provides clothing and services to women who are making the transition from welfare to work.

After lunch, we went to breakout sessions. I chose “Stress Busting,” and “Many Faces of AmeriCorps.” Both had great speakers, and I feel I walked away with a lot of information that I could use as an AmeriCorps member. Some of the other sessions offered were “Engaging Faith Based Organizations,” “Motivating a Team Atmosphere,” “Representing Yourself and AmeriCorps,” and “Personal Excellence.”

After the breakaway sessions, we all reported back to the main hall for the swearing in ceremony. Everyone said the AmeriCorps Pledge and was sworn in to their term of National Service. The day concluded with each group sending up one member to introduce their program and say a few words. From our group was Frances Clark, a first year member.

To conclude the trip, we stopped at Tanner’s Orchard on the way home. Everybody had fun shopping, testing cider, and taking a group picture. The trip was great, and I hope everyone enjoys the trip next year.

2nd Annual Patriots Day Book Drive
by Lena Alba

On September 11th, 2003 the ABC Literacy Program participated in Patriots Day by beginning the second Annual Children’s Book Drive. Books collected are donated to holiday food baskets, homeless or domestic violence shelters, and other sites.

Several schools were involved this year including Amboy Central; Ashton; Thomson; East Coloma, St. Andrew and Riverdale in Rock Falls; Franklin, Jefferson, Washington and Challand Middle School in Sterling, and Teen Action Zone of Sinnissippi Centers.

More than 1200 books were collected for recycling in the communities. Many, many thanks to all those who participated in this year’s book drive.

Fright Fest
by Lena Alba

On Monday, October 13, 2003 Teen Action Zone of Sinnissippi Centers took an all day trip to Great America for Fright Fest. Fright Fest is a festival that Great America has every year around Halloween. Workers of the adventure park dress in costumes from every scary movie and walk around the transformed park scaring children and adults alike, while scary music is heard everywhere.

AmeriCorps members stationed at Teen Action Zone and several volunteer chaperones accompanied 18 students ranging from 6th grade to 9th grade to the fest.

Book Review
by Davia Merced

The Thief Lord by Conelia Funke is an excellent mystery adventure for Junior High aged kids up to adults. Conelia Funke is a best selling author and the third most popular children’s book writer in Germany, after J. K. Rowling and R. L. Stine.

This tale begins in a detective’s office in Venice, Italy where Esther Hartlieb is demanding the return of her deceased sister’s children, Prosper and Bo. They run away when they find out that their aunt only wants to adopt Bo and send Prosper away to a boarding school.

Refusing to split up, the two brothers escape to Venice and meet an orphan by the name of Hornet. Hornet introduces them to other runaways as well as Scipio, the Thief Lord. Scipio is a young boy who steals fancy items from Venetian homes so his friends can eat and have clothes to wear.

The plot thickens throughout the book when the Thief Lord takes on an important job from the Conte. Will he get it done? Will the detective who is so desperately looking for them catch Prosper and Bo? Will Scipio’s real identity be revealed? Conelia Funke answers these questions when you read The Thief Lord.
Here is what they had to say about the trip: Tyler M., age 11, “I liked it because the people scare you and it was fun, and I liked the rollercoasters, especially the Demon.” Christina L. and Cadace M., both age 11, said “It was a fun trip.” Shakiyla B., age 11, said “It was raw, the bomb!” Tanner M., age 11, agreed “It was awesome!” Jake R., age 13, raved “Freddy went on the Batman with me. That’s why it was fun.” Haley C., age 11, said “I thought the most fun of Great America was the bloody river because I got soaked.” Anthony C., an AmeriCorps member serving at TAZ added, “I was glad to be a part of the trip. For most of the kids it was their first time there, and it was fun to hear what aspects of the park impressed them the most. And of course the rides were amazing.” The other member serving at TAZ is Maggie H. She said, “The kids really seemed to enjoy the trip. They talked about it non-stop throughout the day, and had all these really funny stories to tell us. I loved the Halloween theme and the Raging Bull, but was very disappointed that I missed the ‘puking man.’”

All in all, the trip was a scary success. The students and chaperones agreed that the trip should be taken again next year.

ABC Literacy Program Alumni Represenat Illinois

by Rebecca White

This year AmeriCorps made history in Washington D.C. In the first week of September 2003, One Hundred Hours of National Service Testimony was held outside the offices of US Congressmen, to educate them on the service provided to communities by hundreds of programs and thousands of AmeriCorps members across the country. This is the first time such a marathon has been organized.

Two alumni members of the ABC Literacy program represented the state of Illinois. Deb Craig, a two-year alumnus of 2002 and 2003, and Stephanie Hazelbower, an alumnus of 2003, flew to Washington for a whirlwind 24-hour demonstration of their dedication to a program in which they strongly believe.

The call for someone to represent Illinois first came to Program Director, Rebecca White, from the Executive Director of the Illinois Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, Asta Bonheyo, just a few days before the beginning of the marathon on Tuesday, September 2. “Can you find someone to go?” Within an hour, Deb and Stephanie had agreed to go, and Rebecca quickly made airline and hotel arrangements.

With hope in their hearts and butterflies in their stomachs, the two flew out of Moline Airport on Thursday evening, September 4th. The next day, they spent the morning site seeing, and the afternoon listening to and then giving testimony in their own words of support for the AmeriCorps program. By that evening, they were flying back to Illinois, mission accomplished.

It is impossible to determine just how much influence the One Hundred Hours of National Service Testimony had on Congress at this time. Surely it did have an impact. What the nation saw was more than 700 participants representing hundreds of thousands of others fighting for something in which they believed in a truly American way. What a great country in which to live and serve!

Member Spotlights

by Faith Stambaugh

This year we have decided to do the member spotlights a little bit differently. Instead of going around and interviewing everyone, we decided to give everyone a survey and have him or her fill it out about themselves.

The first person that we are going to tell you about is not a member. She is our program director. Her name is Rebecca White. Rebecca’s birthday is September 15. Her favorite board game to play is Mancala because it involves strategy. She likes to listen to Oldies, Bluegrass, Classical, and Contemporary Christian music. Her favorite color is green and the most important thing in her life is her family. She likes to eat seafood and loves storms. If Rebecca could meet one person in the world, dead or alive, it would be Jesus because that is the person that she respects the most. Her favorite holiday is Christmas because it is a family time. If Rebecca could have any job in the world it would be running a foundation that gives money for worthy not-for-profit projects. (Like AmeriCorps!) If you asked her if the glass was half full or half empty she would say that it depends on if you are pouring in or out! But otherwise half full, and she does not type with her fingers on the right keys. Rebecca has two other members of her immediate family. They are her husband, Linley, to whom she has been married for 29 years, and her daughter Alisa, who is 22 years old.

The next person that I am going to spotlight in this edition is our program assistant, Tammy Brinkmeier. Tammy was born on November 15. Her favorite board game is Catch Phrase. She says “It is fast paced. It is funny to hear what people yell out.” She also loves her 70’s music. Tammy couldn’t just pick one favorite color. She said it was a tie between green
and yellow. Her favorite food is Mexican, especially salsa and tacos. If you were to ask her if her glass was half full or half-empty she says “It is half empty.” This comment surprises me about Tammy because she always is so happy and chipper. Some more interesting facts about Tammy are that she loves storms, her favorite holiday is Christmas, and she always uses the right keys when typing. If Tammy could meet one person, dead or alive, she wants to meet Anne Frank. When Tammy was asked what job she would want if she could have any job in the world she said that she would like to be in public relations or a screen writer for Saturday Night Live. The most important thing in her life is her family, which consists of her husband, Scott, of 14 years, her two sons, Trent who is 8 and Colin who is 12, and last, but most certainly not least, her dog Mojo.

The third person I chose to spotlight in this issue is Jessica Lu Adkins, but her friends just call her Lu. Jessica’s birthday is August 3. She couldn’t just pick one board game - instead she picked 3. She likes Sorry because, for some reason, she always wins, and she also likes to play Cranium and Scategories. “Lu” loves any and all kinds of music. Her favorite color, or should I say colors, is any shade of blue. If Jessica could meet any person in the world, dead or alive, she said that it would have to be her grandpa. But, she also said that she would like to meet her cousin who was adopted, because she never was able to. When Jessica was asked what she would like to be if she could be anything in the world her reply was, “a professional ballerina, an actress, or a personal trainer.” The most important things in Jessica Lu’s life are her family, friends, happiness, and love. She doesn’t have a husband or any kids, but she does have a brother. Jesse lives with her mom and her grandma.

This tells you readers about a couple of people in the ABC Literacy Program. In every issue you will learn a little bit more about a couple of more members. We love our kids and we love our commitment because we are getting things done!!

AmeriCorps Benefits Children (ABC) Literacy Program is a venture, sponsored by Sauk Valley Community College, whose mission is to help raise the reading levels of children in local schools, and promote volunteerism within the community. If interested, call Rebecca White at 815-288-5511 ext 313, or email whiter@svcc.edu