On Wednesday, October 16, 2002 many local AmeriCorps members attended the Opening Day Ceremony in Springfield, IL. The theme was “A Year of Dedication, a Lifetime of Service.”

The day started at 9:30 a.m. at the Crown Plaza Hotel. For our team members it started much earlier, with some members going down the night before, and other driving three hours that morning.

The most inspirational part of the celebration was listening to the morning speaker, Michael Gaines. Gaines is an AmeriCorps Program Officer with the Illinois Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service. As he spoke, he encouraged each and everyone one of us to do our best to improve our communities. His words made us feel proud to be American and to be AmeriCorps members.

After listening to his speech, I felt an enormous sense of purpose, excitement, optimism and just overall happiness.

Following the speakers we went into break-out sessions where we had the opportunity to choose from various speakers and listen to their program. Some of the topics included “Stress Reduction through Exercise and Lifestyle Changes,” “Preparing For the Unexpected,” and “The Power of Togetherness.”

Jose Wilson spoke on “Stress Reduction Through Exercise and Lifestyle Changes.” Mr. Wilson is a very dynamic speaker. He spoke to us about how your lifestyle impacts your health and weight, how you can get a good workout without having to join a gym, the best food to stay away from, how you can change your diet, and what is wrong with the Standard American Diet. “Mr. Wilson was one of the best speakers there in my opinion.”

Another program offered was “Preparing For the Unexpected.” The American Red Cross put on this one. The program provided information on what to do in the event of an emergency, and how to respond to direction from authorities. The ladies showed demonstrations on basic first aid, and reviewed what you should have in a kit at home.

Another program offered was “The Power of Togetherness” by Matt Wells. This program taught members to empower individuals and work as a team by learning basic communication, team working skills, goal setting, leadership, and becoming a positive member of a team. These basic elements provide a solid base for people to develop a group attitude towards accomplishing goals. “Life After AmeriCorps” and “Citizen Corps,” were two programs offered, but due to limited time each person was only able to choose two programs to attend. All the speakers were talented and helpful, according to the many other area members I was able to speak with.

Following the break-out sessions we enjoyed lunch in the ballroom. It gave us the opportunity to speak with other members about the programs they attended, and the other members from across the state that they were able to meet. After the relaxing lunch we were able to listen to a speech by Michael Meener, a former AmeriCorps member, and Executive Director of National AmeriCorps Association.

In conclusion the Opening Day Ceremony was an educational experience and a very exciting trip. The speakers were informative, interesting and very familiar with our needs as AmeriCorps members. We learned some helpful hints about our education award and doing our part in teamwork.

Continued on page 2
Opening Day, cont.

It was one of those days that made you realize exactly why you are involved in AmeriCorps, as a day that simply made you feel good about yourself and the future ahead of you. It was fun to be with our team members and with members of other Illinois AmeriCorps groups. We would suggest that everyone attend next year.

A special thank you to Rebecca for the trip to Tanners Apple Orchard on the way home. It was a great break from the long ride. People were able to stretch their legs and purchase some of the great things they have there, such as sweet apple cider.

Welcome

Assistant Program Director

We would like to welcome aboard and introduce you to Tammy Brinkmeier, our new Programs Assistant.

Tammy began her new position with us the end of August 2002. She is Rebecca’s full-time, right-hand woman.

Tammy has lived in Dixon her whole life. She and her husband Scott have been married 14 years. They have two great boys, Colin (11) and Trenton (7). The boys are very active in wrestling, roller hockey, football and baseball.

Needless to say Tammy is kept very busy with her job and family responsibilities.

Welcome to our team Tammy, and we hope you stay with us for a long time.

SWAP MEET

by Julie Johnson

We started something new with our group this year that I felt was a huge success. We held a swap meet on Tuesday, December 3rd from 5:30 – 6:30 p.m. Some members brought bags of clothes, shoes, knick-knacks, and collectibles to “swap” with each other. The turnout was great! Thanks to all who brought their “stuff” to share with others. We donated what was left over to area thrift shops.

This is an event that members want to repeat in the spring.

Book Review

by Caroline Singleton

On the roster of popular books among my third and fourth graders is the classic story of “Paddington Bear” by Michael Bond. This is the tale of a bear who stows away on a ship bound for England. The bear is from “darkest Peru”. A mom and dad discover him at a train station in London. The parents take him home to their two children, who embark on many adventures with Paddington Bear.

This story is delightful and imaginative. It will probably stretch an eight or nine year old’s vocabulary just enough to challenge them. In our class the children were motivated to do story illustrations, which helped them to sequence events in the story. This book is on at least one list of the fifty all-time best books for kids.

Another very good book for the younger children is “Bravo, Livingstone Mouse!” by Pamela Duncan Edwards and Henry Cole. This is a story of a little mouse that sets off to explore the woods on the night the animals are putting on a large talent show. However, all the performers are having trouble with the acts. Livingstone keeps telling them that their rhythm is off. He saves the day when he and his insect friends become an orchestra, with Livingstone as the orchestra leader keeping the rhythm for everyone.

This book is good for you and your child to curl up with on a cold winter’s night, especially if your child’s school has a “turn off the TV and read night.” Many schools are participating in this program of turning the TV off for half an hour to an hour one night, and reading with children. Some schools will even have a drawing for students in the school that participate in this program. The winning student from each class receives a new book of their own. I encourage this greatly.

FREE BOOKS AT BIRTH AND BEYOND

A new program just implemented in January in Whiteside County is LIFE – Literacy is Fun for Everyone. In this community effort, each newborn is given a book at the hospital. Parents are then encouraged to sign up for the free program, in which the child will receive a book each month until he or she turns five years old.

Continued on page 3
The program is sponsored by local schools, public libraries, the United Way, service clubs, CGH hospital, ABC Literacy Program, and other interested community members. What a great way to encourage children to be read to and later to read themselves!

LIFE WITH ABC LITERACY
by Mildred Harding

Since the start of the year, there have been a variety of activities that many of our members have participated in.

The biggest one is the RIF book giveaway that was talked about in the last newsletter. There were 15 schools that participated in this giveaway. In these schools there were about 675 students that have received three new books, absolutely free for the children to keep as their own. The pupils were very excited to get these books. One little girl made the comment to me that “She never had a book of her own to keep.” As she said this to me, she had tears running down her cheeks. I think this is an amazing program and am proud to be able to participate in it. The final book giveaway was in January, close to Martin Luther King Day.

There have been several parades to join and dances to chaperone, and many members are taking American Red Cross training on disaster preparedness. Watch for the next newsletter for more about this.

As we begin a new year, we look forward to many events that will show that AmeriCorps GETS THINGS DONE.

Family Halloween Night
by Faith Stambaugh

The YMCA of Dixon hosted a Family Halloween Night on October 25.

That night there was open swim, pumpkin painting, a costume contest and a haunted room. I was in charge of the pumpkin painting.

In the pumpkin painting room were two hundred miniature pumpkins. Every child and parent was encouraged to paint his or her own pumpkin. Some even painted more than one, since we had so many pumpkins. The children, and parents were very creative and very careful. Everyone enjoyed themselves and had a lot of fun.

The costumes were great to see. Even most of the parents were dressed up. There were very elaborate costumes and very plain costumes. But they were all very nice.

Everyone had lots of fun and it was a big success.

COMING EVENTS

January 11  Red Cross training began. This is scheduled for five Saturdays: 1/11, 1/25, 2/8, 2/22, 3/1.

February 1  First Reflection Retreat at Holiday Inn, Rock Falls  9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

March 15  Parenting Conference, Sauk Valley Community College  7:15 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

March 16  St. Patrick’s Day Parade, Dixon, time and line-up location to be announced later

March 29  SVIC Family Conference, Holiday Inn, Rock Falls  7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

April 5  Book Bee/Child Fair, Sauk Valley Community College  8:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

April 12  National Youth Service Day Tree Planting, times and locations to be announced later (Rain date is April 26)

May 18  Just Say No Parade, Dixon, 8:00-11:30 a.m.

July 6  Petunia Festival Parade, Dixon, time to be announced later

July  Second Reflection Retreat, exact date, time and location to be announced later

July 30  Graduation 7:00 Sauk Valley Community College, Room 1K4

Introducing Two New Members

Since the last newsletter we have had two new members join our team. They are:

JoAnn Galvan who is at Washington School, Sterling.

Rebecca Roschi who is at Jefferson School in Oregon.

Welcome aboard.

Look in the next issue of InnerAmeriCorps for more interviews of our new members and about why they joined AmeriCorps and how this experience has affected them.
With graduation six months away, our director Rebecca White will soon be looking for new AmeriCorps applicants for 2003-2004 year. The main purpose of AmeriCorps is to help children discover, learn and love reading.

Full-time members put in 1,700 hours of service over a year from August 4-July 31. They receive a living allowance of $9,900 and an education award of $4,725.

Part-time members serve 900 hours from August 4 until May 31st. They receive a living allowance of $5,241 and an education award of $2,363.50.

Reduced part-time members serve 675 hours from August 4 until May 31st. They receive a living allowance of $3,930 and an education award of $1,800.

Quarter-time members serve 450 hours from August 4 until May 31st, with a living allowance of $2,620 and an education award of $1,250.

If a student at SVCC is taking at least six credit hours each semester, and is income eligible, he or she may qualify to be a reduced part-time or quarter-time work study member receiving $6.15 per hour, with the required hours and education award listed previously for those categories. Work study members serve from August 4 through May 15.

As you are reading this newsletter, and you think that AmeriCorps would be the perfect program for someone you know, have them contact Rebecca White, at 815-288-5511 ext 313.

Many members would gladly give you a testimonial on the benefits and personal rewards we have received from working with AmeriCorps.

The joy you receive from helping just one child achieve his or her reading independence is worth all the hours that we put into the service of our community.

_________________

AmeriCorps Benefits Children 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.