This is who we are, and this is what we do!

By Chris Lybarger, Class of 2006 Newsletter Editor

After graduating high school, I had no idea where I was going or what I wanted to do. I knew I had to go to school and that was all. I knew that I needed something more fulfilling in my life, more fulfilling than just going to school every day…

Then, it was a good friend of mine that told me about AmeriCorps. A member already, he had some insider information for me. Naturally, it wasn’t all too appealing at first thought. “I grade papers, so what?” But, after my orientation and my initial first days on my site, I began to see things differently. I hadn’t understood at first, but there was so much more to this organization than grading papers.

And after I helped my first student pass a spelling test, I had a full-blown realization – I wasn’t there to simply take the workload off of the teacher’s back. I was a tutor. I was a mentor. I was a role model. And this was what AmeriCorps was all about.

Of course, that wasn’t the end of the journey. Throughout my time in the program I went places I never dreamed of going, learned things that, as far as I’m concerned, are far more important than finding the circumference of a circle or the capital of Tahiti. I was learning about people – all different kinds of people, and how to communicate with them and help them with issues that, perhaps, they would never tell anyone else about.

And as I was learning so much about all these different people, I took a minute to step back and get a good look at the people that had taken it upon themselves to join this group I was so proud to call my own. And such people I saw! People of all different ages, genders and backgrounds! There were not only kids like myself, but grandmothers and grandfathers. There were athletes and even the handicapped were there – all with a purpose. To work hard, to strengthen our communities and to make sure our youth have a brighter tomorrow than we had yesterday.

As I looked at those people and thought about what they were doing and what I, myself, was doing, I couldn’t help but think of all the people who asked me why I was doing this – why I was going to these retreats and working with children…

I think I’ll let someone else answer that for me…

“We can do no great things in life, only small things with great love.” – Mother Theresa

We are AmeriCorps. This is who we are and this is what we do.
You can raise $300.00 in one week! An Internet scam? No, the Rock River Branch was offering fund raising tips to future walkers on the Alzheimer’s Memory Walk. Several other ABC AmeriCorps team members and I began fund raising efforts weeks before the event.

Cloudy skies greeted the ABC AmeriCorps team, Jessica Dowd, Joyce Duncan, Nancy Frerichs, Paul Gale, Alan McFalls, Jo Owens, and Pisa Stewart, on September 24, the day of the walk. The walkers’ efforts to be at SVCC before 8:00 a.m. were rewarded with donuts, muffins, fruit, and coffee. We enjoyed the Boot Scooting Seniors line dancing presentation, posed for our team pictures, did stretching exercises, and then started the walk.

The walkers were a diverse group. A child in a wheelchair, parents with babies in strollers, numerous children, adults, and gray-haired grandparents walked to raise money. Monies raised helps support the Chapter’s many free services for the more than 3,000 individuals with Alzheimer’s and other memory loss disorders and their caregivers in the Sauk Valley area.

As the walk neared the end, door prizes were given to the lucky winners of a drawing, to the individual and team raising the most money, and to the oldest walker. When the last of the walkers was in his car going home, it started to rain…

Quotable Quote:
“When Spider Webs Unite, They Can Tie Up A Lion” – Ethiopian Proverb

*Factoid*
ABC AmeriCorps collected $346.26 for Hurricane Katrina Relief! That amount was given to the Red Cross collection at K Mart put together by Sally Garcia, and the total she collected for the day was $2,933.28. Our collection was a big part of that amount!

Give a big thanks to everyone who contributed to the success of the Patriot’s Day book drive. ABC AmeriCorps members collected over 2,500 children’s books from all over the area. The majority of these books benefited the Whiteside County Health Department’s reading corner, where kids can take books home with them after their visit. Job well done to those who gave, collected, and dropped off all of these books, especially Diane Schlesinger who collected over 800 books all by herself. Remember, the power of one person can make a significant difference in the lives of many.

AmeriCorps members also helped the AAUW (American Association of University Women) with their annual book fundraiser. What a great way to spread literacy in the Sauk Valley area!

Have a heart- Save a heart
By Flo Cunningham

All AmeriCorps members are required to take Heartsaver CPR, Universal First Aid and Disaster Trainings. Each training was instructed by well qualified individuals from both The American Heart Association, AHA Region and The American Red Cross, Lincoln Land Chapter. Each class was thorough and detailed. Upon completion of the training, AmeriCorps members became certified and are eligible to respond to emergencies when needed or when called upon.

Book Review
By Joyce Duncan

Good Night Moon. This timeless classic written by Margaret Wise Brown allows every child to relate to the little bunny. The little bunny finds many reasons not to go to sleep just as every child has done but falls asleep to the reassuring voice of the little old lady whispering “hush”.

1. Alzheimer Memory Walk
   By Joyce Duncan

2. Book Drive Spectacular
   By Sabrina Earl

3. Have a heart- Save a heart
   By Flo Cunningham

4. Book Review
   By Joyce Duncan
Brown eyes twinkled and a shy smile crept over her face. “Yes, that’s me.” At age 65, Florence Cunningham had earned an Associates Degree in Human Services. “My doctor,” she continued, “wanted me to go to the hospital. I agreed only if I could go to graduation. Graduation day came; I waited for the doctor to release me. At 4:00 he finally came. I left the hospital and went to my graduation ceremony.”

Flo worked last year as a foster grandparent at Merrill School with 3rd and 4th grade children. This year she is an AmeriCorps member working at Sterling High School. She tutors, grades homework papers, and does a lot of listening to her high school students.

Flo’s family consists of twins and 3 other children. Her children are grown and starting their own careers and families.

Whenever I consider what to write, I think about the highlights of the event. Of course, this is only from my perspective, but hopefully many of my fellow members will relate. The opening day celebration for AmeriCorps 2005-2006 members took place in Bloomington this year. Not a long road trip, but enough to get us out of bed to see the sunrise and to get yummy pastries for breakfast. Some of you, and you know who you are, decided to eat the cookies first because they make such a nutritional breakfast meal. “No, you can not have our cookies” was heard at our many pit stops where I guess the sugar took effect, because I saw many members trying to catch long-legs Alan, but none succeeded.

We did manage to make it to Bloomington, and thanks to Becki’s planning and constant e-mails, relevantly on time. The place was packed full of Illinois AmeriCorps members from various ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds. Some groups were small and some had to come in charter buses. ABC AmeriCorps had 26 representatives in attendance (see picture on page 4) to share in taking the oath with the 500 plus represented there that day from all over Illinois. The highlight of the day for me, besides the relaxation session, was the keynote speaker. I must admit I was a little concerned when they brought him in handcuffs, but I figured if Martha Stewart gets requests for speeches then so could he. If all of us remember why we signed up for AmeriCorps then I am sure we will all have a successful year. Good luck and go make a difference!

**Quotable Quote:**
“Knowledge Is Better Than Riches.”
- Cameroonian Proverb
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