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AmeriCorps: Boon or boondogg

\$658,000 allotted
for garden project
in East St. Louis

By George Pawlaczyk

Belleville News-Democrat

EAST ST. LOUIS — Does this sound like getting things done for America?

- Community gardens are planted but become overgrown with weeds.
- Workers are paid during the winter to sit around and do nothing.
- The same workers are sent home at noon during the summer because it's too hot.

These and other factors have turned an ambitious \$658,000 federal jobs program in East St. Louis into what the director admits has been a disappointment.

This is AmeriCorps — a program begun last year by President Clinton that was supposed to provide job training and education benefits for workers and raise community spirit in poor neighborhoods.

But after 10 months, the local program still lacks basic equipment, and Director Don Wallace plans to lay off 15 workers early because the program is nearly out of money.

"I'll take the blame for letting them sit around all of January," Wallace said. "I should have given them the month off. Maybe then we would have had enough money to pay them."

With the motto "I will get things done for America," AmeriCorps workers set out to work for a year in their communities while earning



PARK DUTY: An AmeriCorps worker uses a chain saw to cut down a tree in Kenneth Hall Park in East St. Louis

AmeriCorps in the metro-east

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News Democrat/Erin Mahr

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With the motto "I will get things done for America," AmeriCorps workers set out to work for a year in their communities while earning minimum wage and money for education.

But the program has since come under fire nationally from congressional critics who call it an inefficient, overpriced bureaucracy.

"We're told we're getting a good government program," said U.S. Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa. "Instead it appears to be a Great Society-style boondoggle."

The program — a domestic version of the Peace Corps — currently is budgeted at \$376 million for 20,000 workers. Clinton wants it

See **AMERICORPS/7A**



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News Democra

AmeriCorps in the metro-east

EAST ST. LOUIS

COST:

\$658,000

PARTICIPANTS:

29 full-time

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

15 gardens begun

8 lots cleared

Flood control work



BELLEVILLE

COST:

\$375,000

PARTICIPANTS:

14 full-time, 12 part-time

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Computer center renovation

Tutoring of students

Rotary Park cleanup

News-Democrat/J.S. Nussbaumer

Belleville workers serve as tutors, day laborers

By Teri Maddox

Belleville News-Democrat

BELLEVILLE — Kim Dammerich pulled off her brown work gloves, wiped the sweat from her brow and broke out in a friendly — yet tired — smile.

She had spent a hot, humid morning at Rotary Park, clearing thick brush, weeds and trash from an overgrown section. Eventually, a

hiking and biking trail through the park along L Creek.

"When we started, you even see the fence, Dammerich, 41, of Belleville

The park cleanup is on projects of Belleville AmeriCorps local arm of the national corps established last year by President Bill Clinton.

See **BELLEVILLE**

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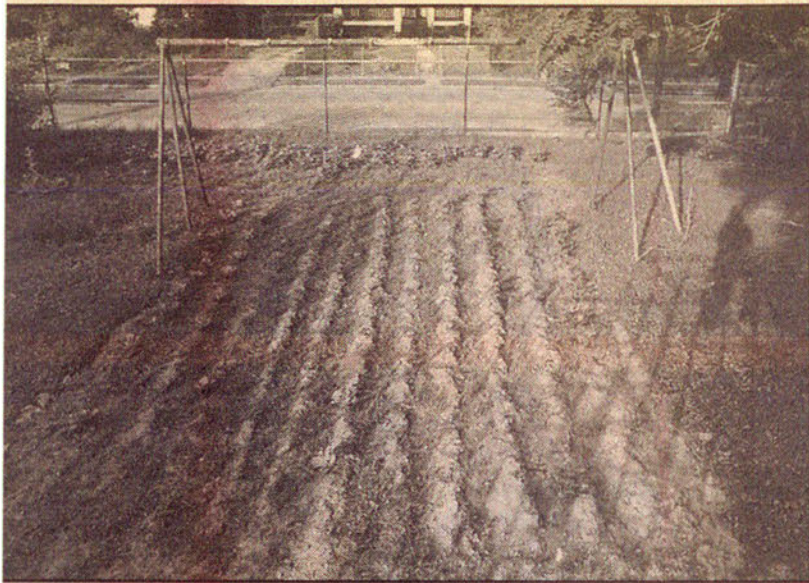
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hiking and biking trail will run through the park along Richland Creek.

"When we started, you couldn't even see the fence," said Dammerich, 41, of Belleville.

The park cleanup is one of the projects of Belleville AmeriCorps, a local arm of the national service corps established last year by President Bill Clinton.

See **BELLEVILLE/7A**



INTENDED: Dying okra plants fill a garden behind Lessie Bates

AmeriCorps —

Continued from 1A

expanded to \$575 million and 33,000 workers next year, while Grassley and others in Congress want it killed.

Overhead has been estimated as high as 50 percent, although local programs claim only 10 percent of their money goes for administration.

And the cost to field each worker, originally estimated at \$13,000 to \$15,000, has escalated to \$27,000, according to a report by the General Accounting Office.

"Taxpayers are paying far more for this program than advertised," Grassley said.

AmeriCorps officials disagree.

"This is community service," said Joel Berg, director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's AmeriCorps division. "It's not just a feel-good plan to change the world. It's supposed to change the people who

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These and 13 other gardens are the most visible results of the horticulture program funded by AmeriCorps.

Twenty-nine workers were hired for the East St. Louis program, which began Oct. 3. Nine workers later were shifted to a separate flood control program.

As the program nears the end of its first year, the 15 gardens built by AmeriCorps workers have been turned over to residents to tend. Many have been overtaken by weeds.

Lacking equipment and supplies, workers now spend much of their time mowing grass, pruning trees or picking up trash. They quit at noon on hot days. During the winter, they sat in their office at State Communi-



WEEDING: A plot behind State Community College is the only garden cared for by AmeriCorps

But some of the lots are overgrown again, and a second greenhouse project in Kenneth Hall Park has barely been touched.

A plan to sell the vegetables from the gardens was scuttled when it was learned that the gardens could not be

Two local programs

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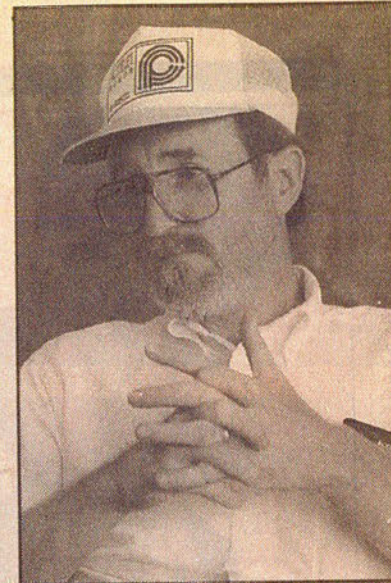
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DIRECTOR: Don Wallace

equipment and supplies was spent on gasoline and other expenses, Wallace said. Last week, only \$500 of that money remained and is reserved for emergencies.

"We never anticipated being short of equipment this late into the project," he said. "We have had to fight for everything we get."

Wallace said that despite the failures, he is proud of the way the program's workers have adapted.

"They have worked hard and have been willing to learn," he said.

James Pace, 40, of East St. Louis said he is proud of the master gardener's certificate he earned in the program after attending a 12-week course at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville.

"It's hard making ends meet on minimum wage, but it's been worth it," said Pace, who plans to start a landscaping business.

Mike Smith, 48, of East St. Louis said criticism of the program's \$27,000 per worker estimated cost is unwarranted.

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News-Democrat/Tim Vizer

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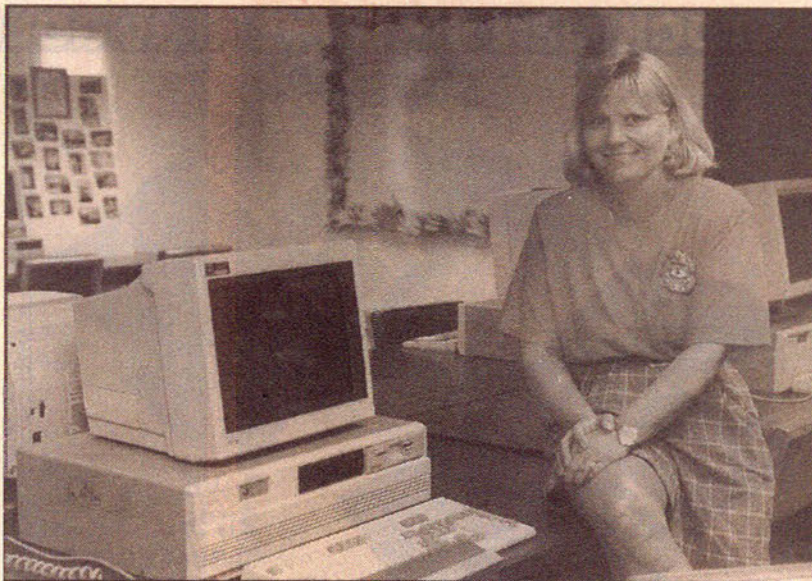
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Jim Williams, 19, of Belleville,
tutored students at West Junior High
School.

"Out of 56 kids, 36 improved
their grades," said Williams, a BAC
student. "Our goal for the whole
(program) was 50 percent, so in our
group we did better, and that meant
a lot to us."

Williams is working this summer
at the Abraham Lincoln day camp,
helping with activities and play-
ground supervision. For him, Ameri-
Corps provided an opportunity to do
community service and earn money
for college.

"It really helps a lot," said
Williams, who plans to major in
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Homeowners who later agreed to have gardens planted on their lots said they were unwilling to tend the plots, only to see the produce trucked off for sale.

"I'm not selling this stuff," said the Rev. Johnny Davis, who said he daily weeds a 50- by-20-foot garden on 8th Street around the corner from his home.

Davis, 63, said that while AmeriCorps workers cleared the ground, he planted the garden himself.

"They gave me some seeds. I haven't seen them since," he said.

Belleville and East St. Louis have the only AmeriCorps programs in the metro-east; there are 22 programs in Illinois.

Cities must apply for AmeriCorps grants. The applications are evaluated and approved by commissions set up by the government. The amount of money cities receive is determined by how much they ask for in their applications, and how well they make their cases.

Full-time workers are paid minimum wage of \$4.25 an hour or slightly higher and receive health insurance coverage for a year worth about \$1,200. Those who stick with the program for a full year also get a \$4,725 grant for college tuition.

Belleville Area College and the Franklin Neighborhood Association administer the Belleville program,

if all the education grants are used. The program's 26 workers have performed a variety of neighborhood improvement projects and worked as tutors in Belleville schools. Its director, Jody Lauf, earns \$23,000 a year.

"Obviously this is taxpayer money that is going into the project, but it's a program in which taxpayers can actually see things that are being accomplished," Lauf said.

Wallace said he didn't plan how to obtain equipment — such as garden tractors and back hoes — when he wrote the project's grant application.

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AmeriCorps officials disagree.

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Community gardens

A small garden in Rush City that was supposed to provide fresh vegetables for neighborhood residents has been abandoned and is overgrown with weeds. A "no trespassing" sign was posted after it was learned the garden mistakenly was placed on public land.

Behind the Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House, another gardening effort has failed. A few cabbages can be seen in it, but little

was planted there.

These and 13 other gardens are the most visible results of the horticulture program funded by AmeriCorps.

Twenty-nine workers were hired for the East St. Louis program, which began Oct. 3. Nine workers later were shifted to a separate flood control program.

As the program nears the end of its first year, the 15 gardens built by AmeriCorps workers have been turned over to residents to tend. Many have been overtaken by weeds.

Lacking equipment and supplies, workers now spend much of their time mowing grass, pruning trees or picking up trash. They quit at noon on hot days. During the winter, they sat in their office at State Community College with little to do.

"Because of the obstacles, we did not accomplish what we set out to do in our first year," said Wallace, who earns \$45,000 a year.

"People think we got a wheelbarrow full of cash down here that we just frittered away, but it just isn't true. I think we've done pretty well considering the circumstances," he said.

Besides building the gardens, AmeriCorps workers cleared eight vacant lots and cleaned out a small greenhouse at East St. Louis Senior High School.



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Belleville Area Community Center Franklin Neighborhood Center administer the Belle

Belleville

Continued from 1A

The program has been criticized by some as an expensive government make-work project with few accomplishments, but others defend it.

"We've increased our park acreage by over 66 percent in the past two years, but our manpower has not increased, so we've been stretched," Parks Director Gary Hopfinger said. "The AmeriCorps people have helped us keep the rubber band from breaking."

Working along with Dammerich were Chris Meyer and Becky Soppe, both 18 of Belleville. They did the work by hand — with clippers and saws — to keep from damaging heavy equipment and to allow recycling of concrete, conduit and steel beams left by a construction company years ago.

About 20,000 people nationwide work in the AmeriCorps program, including 14 full-timers and 12 part-timers in Belleville. They're paid minimum wage of \$4.25 an hour or slightly higher — Belleville workers



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course at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville.

"It's hard making ends meet on minimum wage, but it's been worth it," said Pace, who plans to start a landscaping business.

Mike Smith, 48, of East St. Louis' said criticism of the program's \$27,000 per worker estimated cost is unwarranted.

"That ain't no money for what we're doing," Smith said last week while using a chainsaw to cut tree limbs in Kenneth Hall Park.

Wallace said the program should not be judged on its accomplishments but on how it has benefited the participants.

"These people have learned responsibility. They've learned what a hard job it is to plant a garden," he said. "They are better off for it. It's better than having them on welfare. Is it better to be sitting around doing nothing or picking up trash?"



"It's Peace Corps work, but we're doing it in our own communities, which makes a lot of sense to me. It's not just another handout program."

— Corky Smith, Belleville AmeriCorps worker

scaper.

"This is the best job I've ever had," Dammerich said, who also has worked in a dental lab, floral shop and fast-food restaurant. "I'm helping my community. I'm helping my country. It's really raised my self-esteem. It's really raised my consciousness about the community."

Another effort was renovating a dilapidated building near Franklin School and turning it into a public computer center. Private contractors and neighborhood residents volunteered on weekends, but AmeriCorps served as the daily work force.

"They did all the tear-out," said Mark Eckert, executive director of the Franklin Neighborhood Community Association. "They did all the dry-walling. They did all the painting. They did all the insulating. They did a lot of work there."

The center is set to open in August with 30 computers donated by Anheuser-Busch.

A block away, an AmeriCorps crew worked with neighborhood families to convert a vacant lot

News-Democrat/Tim Vizer

ps worker, cleans up brush in Rotary Park in Belleville

About 20,000 people nationwide work in the AmeriCorps program, including 14 full-timers and 12 part-timers in Belleville. They're paid minimum wage of \$4.25 an hour or slightly higher — Belleville workers get \$4.38 an hour — and earn educational grants of \$4,725 for a year of full-time service.

Most of the Belleville workers are local residents, ranging from recent high school graduates to middle-age changing careers. Nearly 80 people applied, filling out a lengthy application that included essay questions on why they wanted to serve.

"We were looking for people who had some interest in the community, people who we thought were committed to service," said Director Jody Lauf of Belleville Area College.

BAC is administering a \$269,000 federal grant for Belleville's AmeriCorps program, which could increase to \$375,000 if all the workers use their education money.

The grant was obtained after a joint application was submitted by BAC, Belleville School District 118 and the Franklin and Abraham Lincoln neighborhood associations. About \$35,000 in matching funds was provided by the city, state and private donors.

"It's Peace Corps work, but we're doing it in our own communities, which makes a lot of sense to me," said Corky Smith, 46, of Belleville, an AmeriCorps worker. "It's not just another handout program."

Smith, a former property manager who wants to go into a field of community service, said it's difficult to make ends meet on the AmeriCorps stipend, but the work is rewarding.

"I'm recapturing some of the idealism I had as a young man," he said.

Recently, Smith and Patricia Haden, 42, of Shiloh, an Air Force



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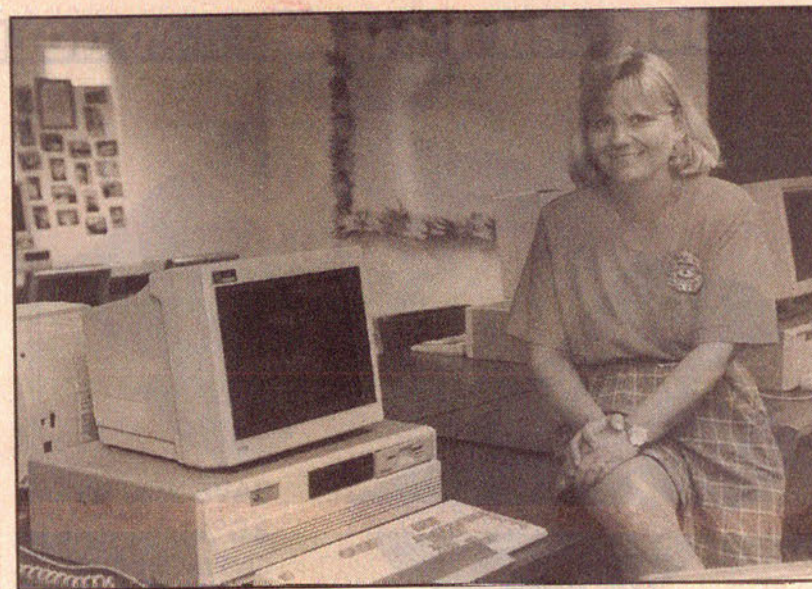
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Belleville AmeriCorps**

retiree, were making home visits to elderly people in Belleville to identify those with safety concerns or special needs. The survey results will be passed on to BAC's Programs and Services for Older Persons.

"Every once in a while, you come in contact with ... a senior citizen who needs help — a lot of help — and they don't know what services are available. That's what this program is all about," said Smith, who works in the public safety category.

Another safety project was helping to enforce a city requirement that all residences have address numbers so emergency vehicles can find them.

AmeriCorps workers went door-to-door on 156 streets in the target



RENOVATED: Director Jody Lauf in new computer center

neighborhoods, bringing 121 homes and apartments into compliance.

Public safety is one of four categories in the AmeriCorps program, along with education, human needs and environment (Belleville has the first three).

Members of the education team have spent most of their time in schools tutoring students, helping in libraries and working at summer day camps. In some cases, this fills gaps left by state cuts in education funding.

Jim Williams, 19, of 1 tutored students at West Ju School.

"Out of 56 kids, 36 their grades," said William student. "Our goal for t (program) was 50 percent. group we did better, and a lot to us."

Williams is working th at the Abraham Lincoln helping with activities ground supervision. For hi Corps provided an opport community service and e for college.

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The Rotary Park cle done by people in the hu category.

Dammerich, a mothe hopes to use her education take horticulture and classes. Soppe and M recently graduated fi school. She plans to becom lish teacher; he wants to

PHOTO COPY
PRESERVATION



News-Democrat/Tim Vizer

CLEANUP: Kim Dammerich, an AmeriCorps worker, cleans up brush in Rotary Park in Belleville

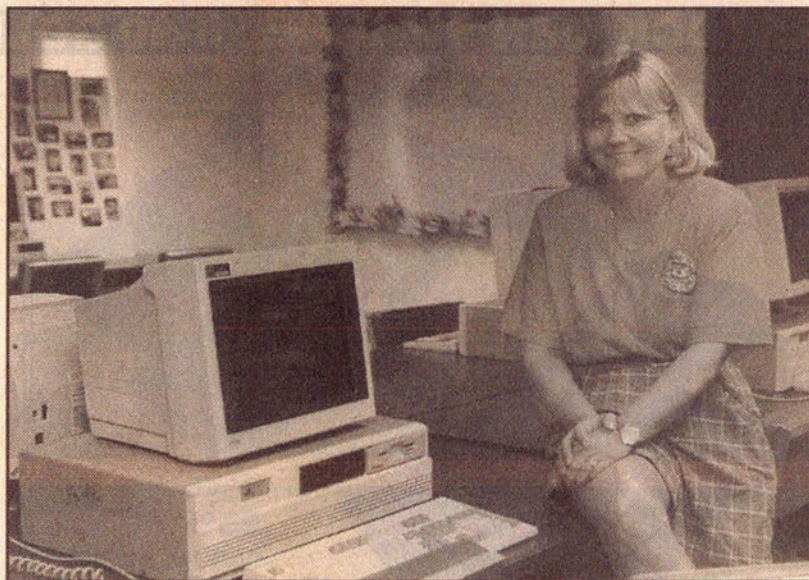
...e looking for people who had some interest in the community, people who thought were needed to service."

Director Jody Lauf
Belleville AmeriCorps

...e making home visits to people in Belleville to identify safety concerns or specific needs. The survey results will be used by BAC's Programs and Older Persons.

...nce in a while, you come with ... a senior citizen help — a lot of help — don't know what services are. That's what this program is about," said Smith, who is in the public safety category. The safety project was helped by a city requirement that residences have address numbers and emergency vehicles can

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Jim Williams, 19, of Belleville, tutored students at West Junior High School.

"Out of 56 kids, 36 improved their grades," said Williams, a BAC student. "Our goal for the whole (program) was 50 percent, so in our group we did better, and that meant a lot to us."

Williams is working this summer at the Abraham Lincoln day camp, helping with activities and playground supervision. For him, AmeriCorps provided an opportunity to do community service and earn money for college.

"It really helps a lot," said Williams, who plans to major in business at Southeast Missouri State. "I wouldn't be able to afford to go away to school without that."

The Rotary Park cleanup was done by people in the human needs category.

Dammerich, a mother of two, hopes to use her educational grant to take horticulture and computer classes. Soppe and Meyer just recently graduated from high school. She plans to become an English teacher; he wants to be a land-

dilapidated building near Franklin School and turning it into a public computer center. Private contractors and neighborhood residents volunteered on weekends, but AmeriCorps served as the daily work force.

"They did all the tear-out," said Mark Eckert, executive director of the Franklin Neighborhood Community Association. "They did all the dry-walling. They did all the painting. They did all the insulating. They did a lot of work there."

The center is set to open in August with 30 computers donated by Anheuser-Busch.

A block away, an AmeriCorps crew worked with neighborhood families to convert a vacant lot owned by St. Paul United Church of Christ into a community garden.

The garden teaches children how to grow vegetables, encourages residents to function as a team and provides a symbol of hope in a neighborhood that once was deteriorating, Eckert said.

"There's a great educational message coming from that garden," he said. "It may not have a huge impact, but it has a very positive impact."

Lauf, the program supervisor, predicted that most participants will continue their educations once they're through in the program because of the "blood, sweat and tears" involved in earning the grants.

"After working for a year to get their grants, I think these people are far more likely to make better use of the education money than someone who just gets a handout," she said.

Several workers said they will continue to do community service as well.

"I think working for AmeriCorps will make us more likely to work as volunteers in the future," Soppe said. "We see how much you can get done by volunteering. We see how good it makes you feel."

RESERVATION

August 4, 1995

Letter to the Editor

Editorial Page Editor

The Belleville News-Democrat

P.O. Box 427

Belleville, MO

To the Editor:

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9597

FCH

The recent article by George Pawlaczyk --- and accompanying editorial and cartoon --- on the USDA-sponsored AmeriCorps project in East St. Louis and Belleville contained many serious inaccuracies and omissions.

Last Fall, your paper also ran a negative article on the project --- also by Mr. Pawlaczyk --- that inaccurately reported that the program started without the proper tools and that severely misquoted AmeriCorps Members. Subsequent to publication of that original story, my staff and I each made individual site visits to the project. We discovered first-hand that the project is "getting things done" while strengthening the community, expanding educational opportunity, and encouraging personal responsibility.

When I learned a number of weeks ago that Mr. Pawlaczyk was preparing another story unfairly and inaccurately attacking the program, I called him immediately. Upon my request, he called me at home that Sunday and we spoke for over an hour. In our conversation, he admitted the bias of both himself and his editor, saying that neither of them personally believe that East St. Louis needs either more gardens or more trees.

It seemed clear in our conversation that he had made his mind up that the whole idea for the program was stupid and that his article would say so, regardless of the facts presented by myself or anyone else. Still, at a few points during our conversation, he admitted that he had misunderstood a few things about the program before speaking to me and that he would correct those issues in his article; unfortunately, his final article included almost all of those mistaken ideas. ~~Even though~~

For example, during our conversation, Mr. Pawlaczyk admitted to me that he knew that preliminary cost estimates leaked to the media by Congressional opponents of AmeriCorps were false, yet he included these numbers in his article as if they were fact. The truth is that each AmeriCorps Member costs at most \$21,000 per year, including a \$4,725 educational award to be used for further college or job training. This per-member figure is \$6,000 less per year than the figure reported by your newspaper.

I would leave this out.

USDA

in Southern Illinois

In addition, the article and editorial both:

- * Exaggerated the cost of the project by at least \$48,000.
- * Severely underreported the amount, the complexity, success, and the importance of the community service performed.
- * Failed to report that the food ^{grown} in the community gardens has been used to help feed hundreds of low-income families.
- * Incorrectly failed to describe the vital planting, outreach, and education service provided by the AmeriCorps Members throughout the winter.
- * Fabricated untrue stories that AmeriCorps Members were paid for quitting early on hot days.
- * Claimed erroneously that the project did not have the required tools and equipment.
- * ~~Confused~~ Confused the reality that the Members are successfully completing the program during the Summer with the false notion that they are somehow being laid-off.

and official terminating their year's service
The truth is that the AmeriCorps Members worked hard throughout the Winter and Summer providing vital services to the people of East St. Louis and Belleville. The truth is the project correctly spent the budget allowed to it. The truth is that Belleville and East St. Louis have both significantly benefited from the service of the AmeriCorps Members.
allotted

I think?
In our conversation, Mr. Pawlaczyk promised his article would include full coverage of the flood-relief work performed by the USDA AmeriCorps crew serving in Belleville. However, his lengthy article only included one eleven-word sentence on flood relief. It is clear that his article did not seriously describe the flood relief work for two reasons: 1) describing such obviously worthwhile work would undermine his assignment to prove AmeriCorps was a "boondoggle," and 2) focusing on Belleville --- where ~~the~~ your paper's readers live --- would hold your paper ~~you~~ much greater reader scrutiny over the accuracy of your claims.

2??
Had the article been fair, it would have reported that the USDA AmeriCorps crew based in Belleville 4,000 feet of stream and land adjoining Bluff Road, which suffered from massive flooding in 1993. Among other things, the AmeriCorps Members surveyed the area, drew survey chart, removed trees that would interfere with the stabilization work, cut out ditches and removed silt, and placed "filter fabric" and rip rocks in the stream to prevent future flooding and erosion. This service was performed far more cheaply by the AmeriCorps crew than had it been performed by government employees or private contractors.

Rip Rip Rap

engineering chart

Mr. Pawlaczyk also failed to report a very moving story from my site visit to the project, which I related to him in our conversation. In June, I travelled to a project site Centerville, where the AmeriCorps Members were working to create a park on land that had been donated by a mother in memory of her son that had been recently shot. On that day, a mostly white group of about 15 7th-and 8th-grade volunteers from St. Phillips Church in Belleville worked alongside the mostly African-American AmeriCorps Members from E. St. Louis building a playground in that new park. This day provided a inspiring testament not only to AmeriCorps' ability to bring people together across racial lines, but how AmeriCorps boosts local volunteer efforts and and empowers local communities.

The true facts are clear. AmeriCorps is cost-effective. AmeriCorps rewards work instead of welfare. AmeriCorps renews the spirit of community involvement that made AmeriCorps great.

I simply hope that when the *News-Democrat* covers this issue in the future, it reports the facts -- and only the facts. ✓

Sincerely,

Joel Berg
Director of National Service
United States Department of Service

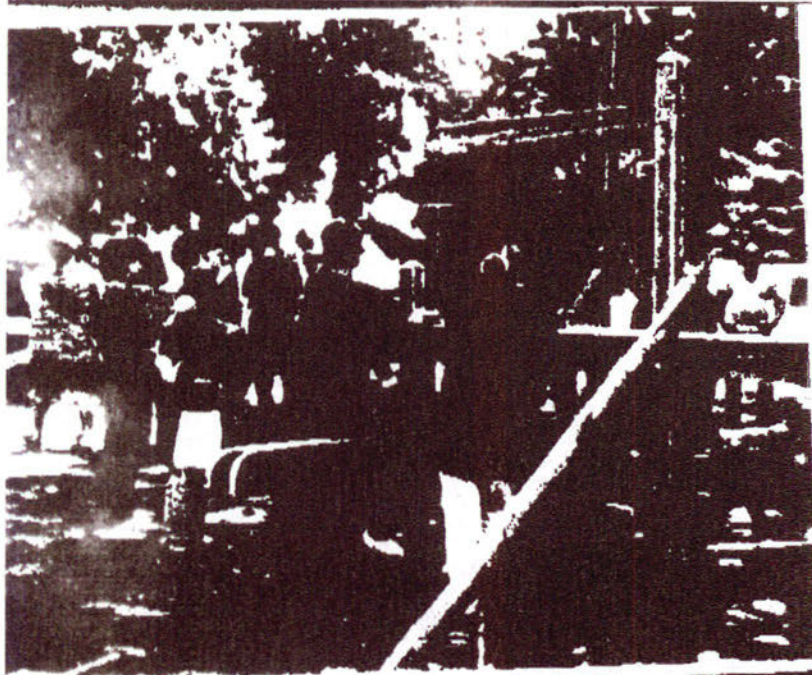
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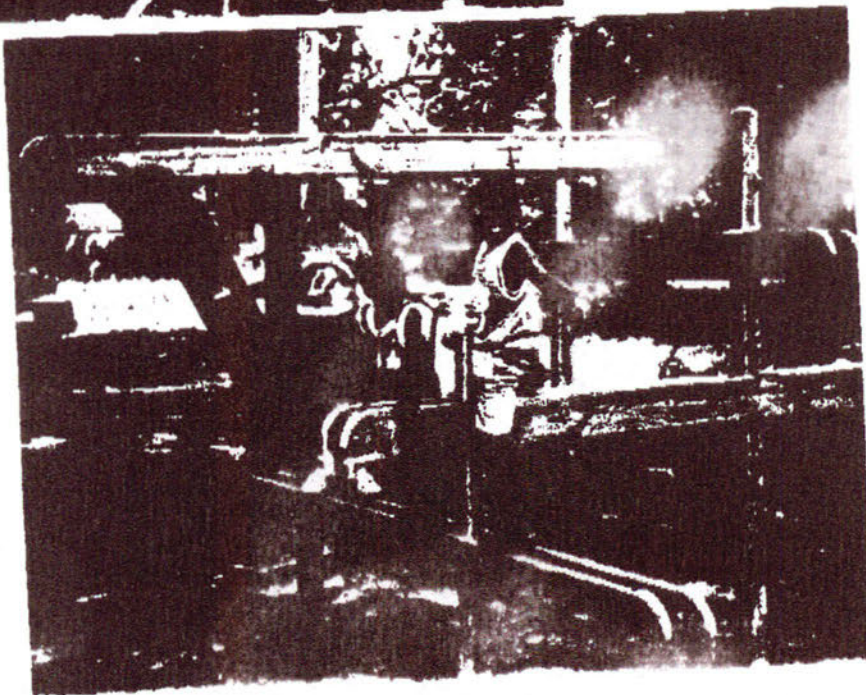
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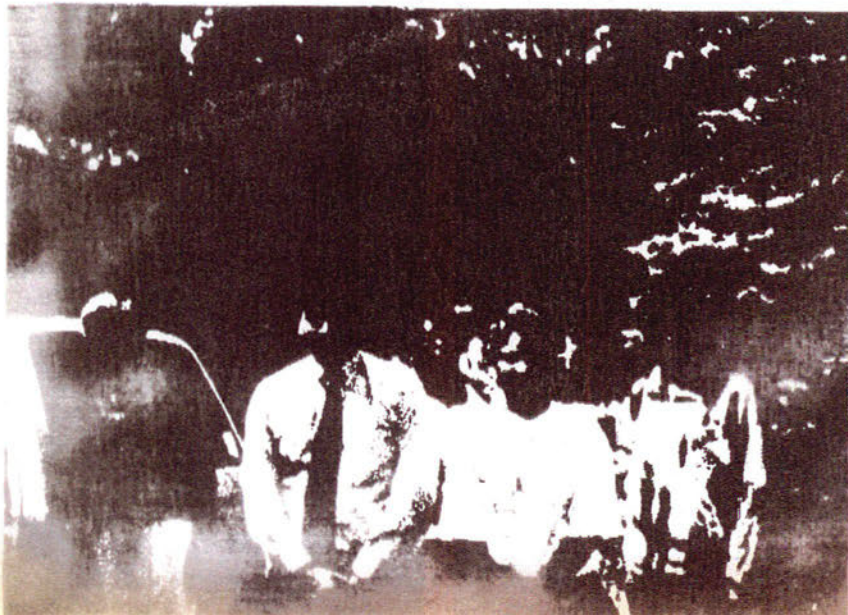
Bluffs Community Park
Centerville, IL.
82nd Street-West

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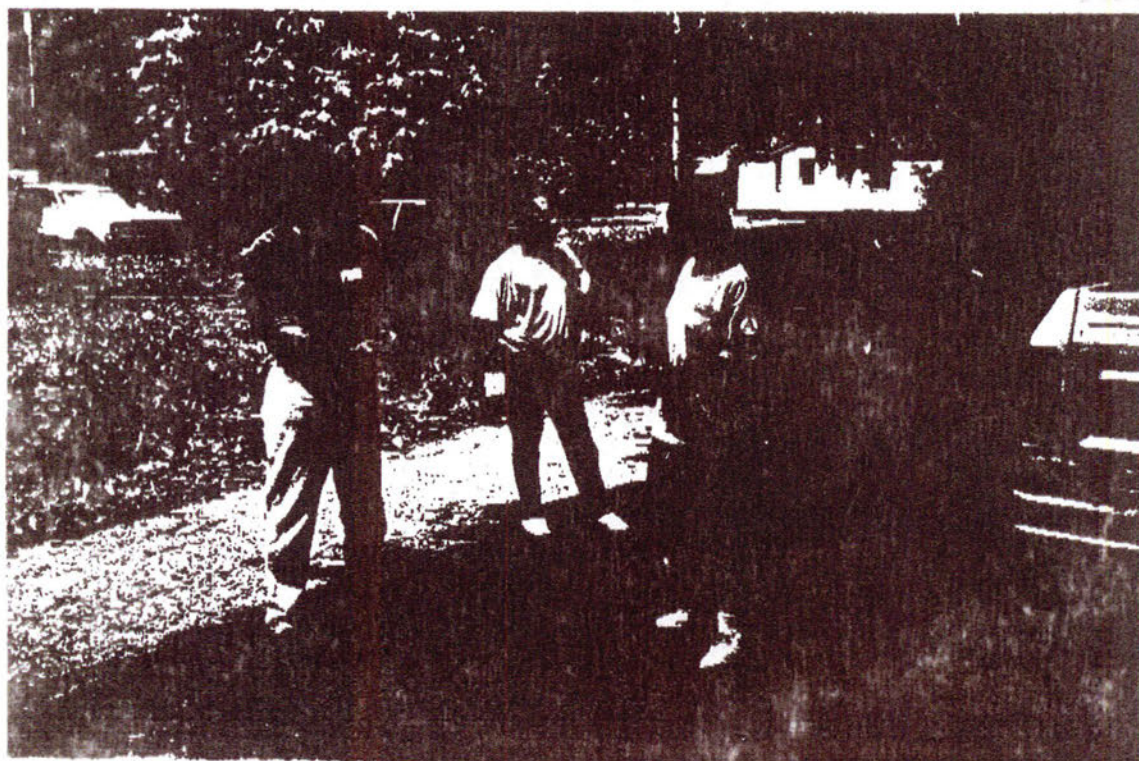
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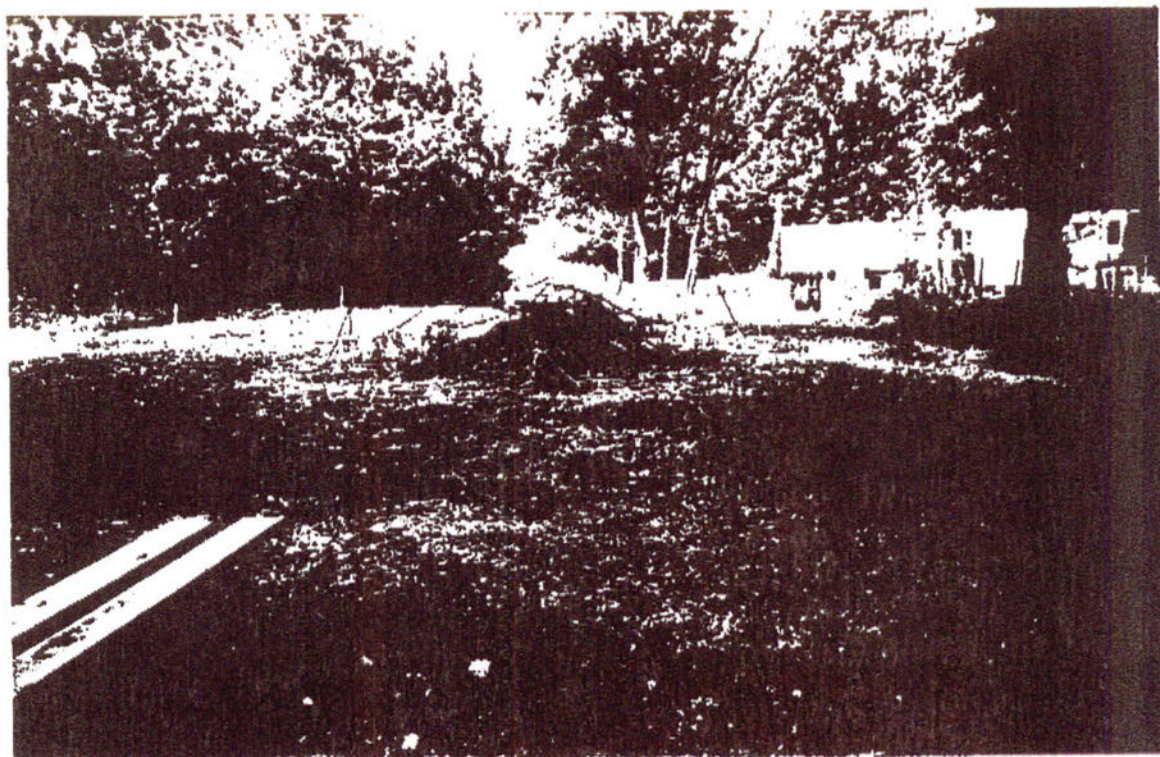
Tour of
the Site



Joel Berg and John Donaero
Visit To Bluff Community Park

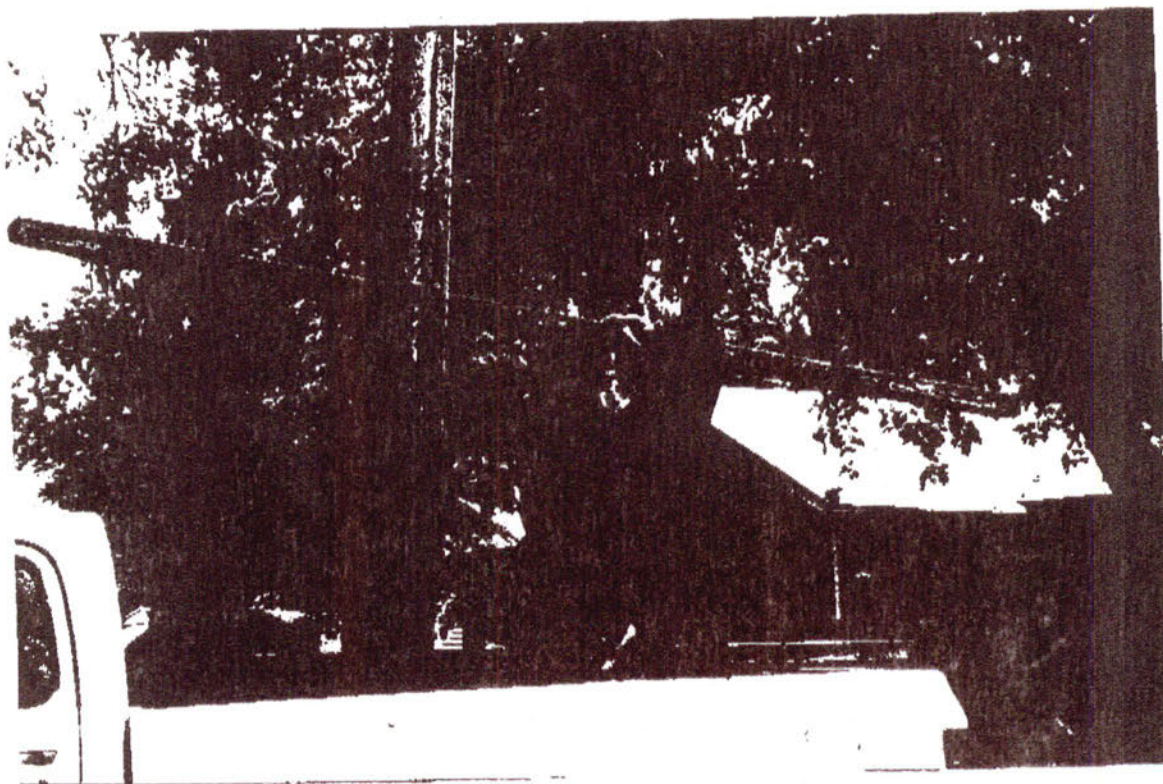


Rod Atterberry & Keith Arnold
Krista White

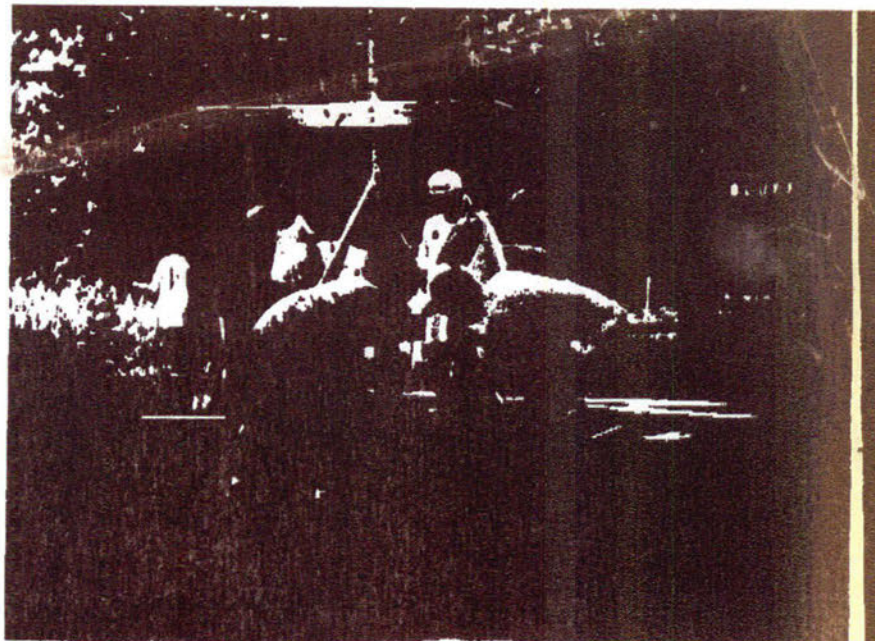


Cleanup Process

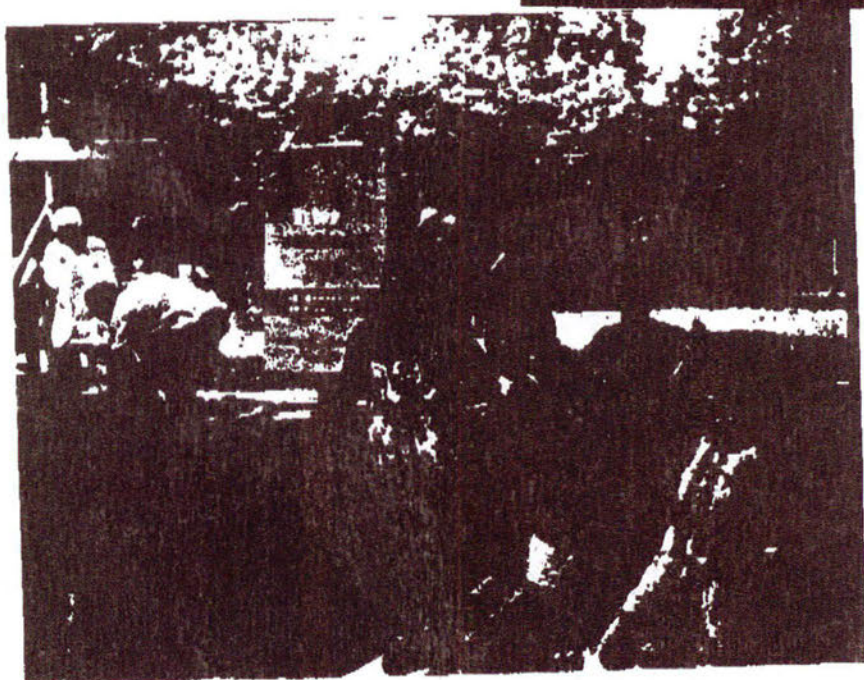
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Gymn Set Hauled to site

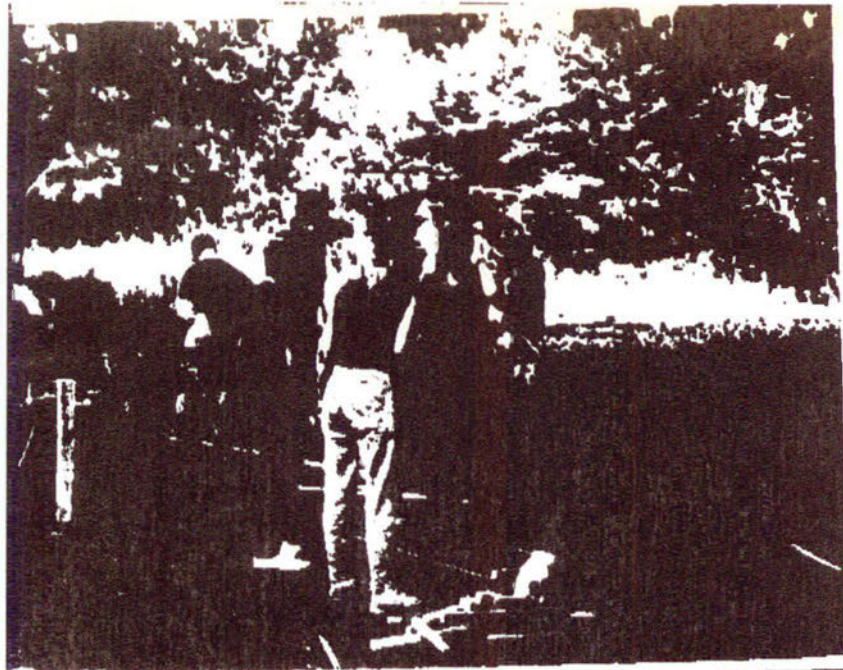


PHOTOGRAPHY
F. L. WILSON



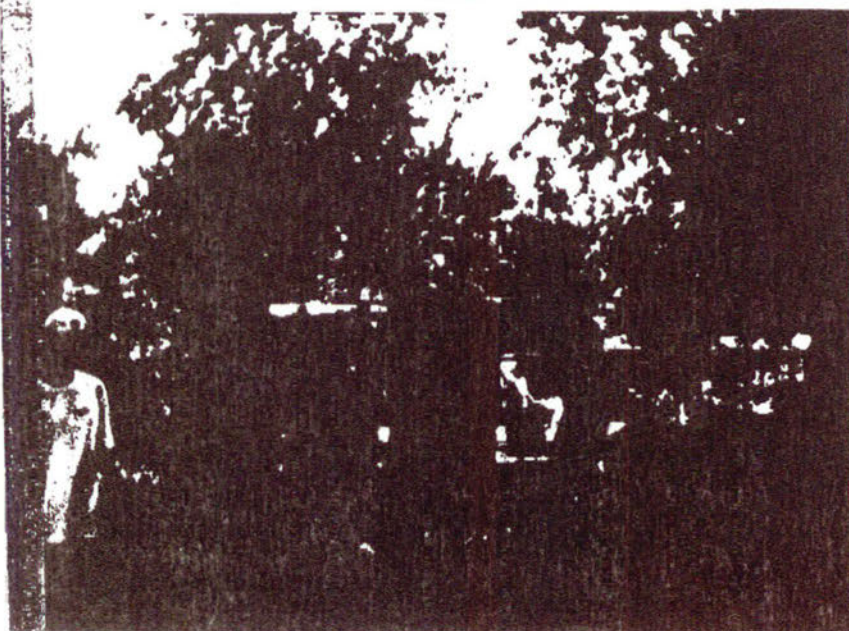
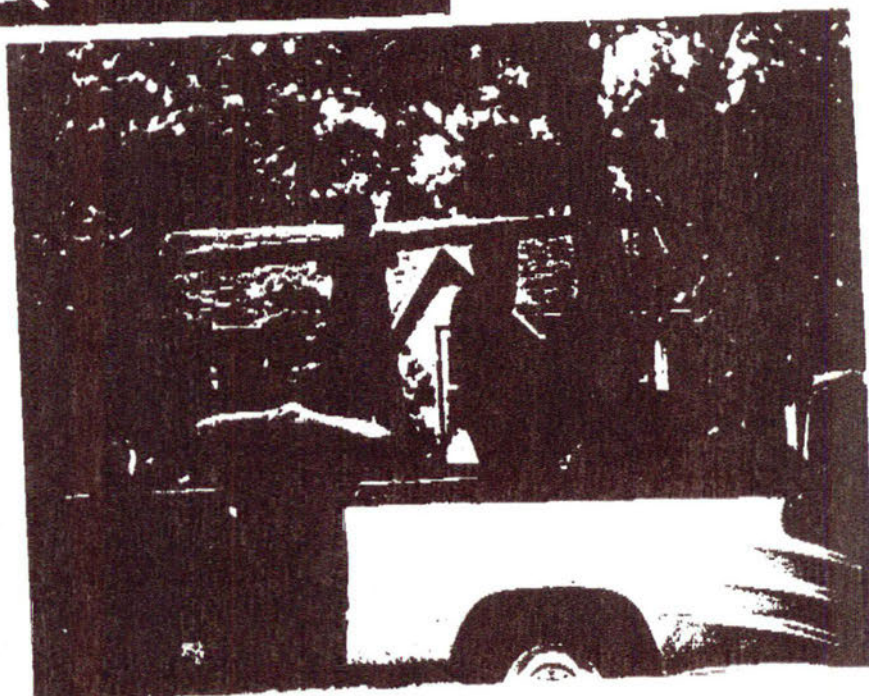
Gymn set installation





Gymn set Being
Installed

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1-1-1995



618 2719737 P.07

AMERICORPS/NRCS

AUG-07-1995 15:38

From: 1 National Service
To: jberg
Date: 8/8/95 12:45pm
Subject: meeting with Congressional Hunger Ctr

Do you want me to invite the DC Service Corps (Carolyn/Robin) to Thursday's meeting with Max et al from the Congressional Hunger Center? I think it would probably be a good idea.

Please advise so I can call DCSC this afternoon.

Donna

Phone 618-271-9540

Fax ~~618-271-2937~~

August 1, 1995

To: Jay Toscano, CNS

From: Joel Berg, USDA

Subject: Newspaper in St. Louis Suburb Does Hatchet Job on E. St. Louis Project

Background:

Yesterday, the *Belleville News-Democrat*, a newspaper based in an Illinois suburb of St. Louis, ran a highly negative article on the USDA East Louis project, a mixed article on a state-commission funded project in Belleville, a negative editorial on AmeriCorps in general, and a negative cartoon about AmeriCorps.

This same paper ran a highly inaccurate article last Fall claiming by George Pawlaczyk that the East St. Louis project started without the proper tools and misquoting many members of the program. At the time, the project responded with a strongly worded letter-to-the-editor correcting the facts.

Subsequent to publication of this original story, my staff and I each made individual site visits to the project. We discovered first-hand that --- although the project is not one of our strongest and is unlikely to be renewed by us --- it is following the basic legal and programmatic requirements of AmeriCorps.

The latest stories, editorial, and cartoon prove that *News-Democrat* is engaged in a unfair campaign to smear both AmeriCorps and the people of East St. Louis, building upon the long-standing racial and political rivalries between East St. Louis and Belleville. The paper has been clear to me that there is no clear division between their news department and their editorial department; therefore, it is no coincidence that the articles, the editorial, and the cartoon appeared on the same day.

When I found out from your staff three weeks ago on a Friday afternoon that the same reporter who did the first piece (George Pawlaczyk) was doing a story on the GAO report, I was suspicious and called the Pawlaczyk immediately and left him a message to call me at home on the weekend before he filed his story.

He called me at home that Sunday and we spoke for over an hour. In our conversation, the reporter admitted the bias of both him and his editor, telling me that neither of them believe that East St Louis needed either more gardens or more

trees. He also implied that neither he nor his editor believes that East St. Louis could govern itself and that any government agencies or community groups in East St. Louis were inherently corrupt. (It took his comments to be patronizing at best, racist at worst). Throughout our conversation, he took the role of giving me his opinions rather than actively requesting facts.

Facts the Reporter Knew But Refused to Include:

Even though the reporter spoke to your staff, he apparently used no information from CNS. Even though I spoke with him for over an hour --- carefully correcting many of his untrue statements to me --- he included only a one line quote from me taken out of context.

During our conversation, he even agreed to and accepted my corrections, but his final article did not include them.

I read him the entire third quarter report for the site, outlining all our projects. First, he disputed the accuracy of the reports. After I insisted that I discovered on my site visits that the accomplishments were real, he simply said he would have to re-visit the sites to determine the accuracy of the accomplishments. Refused to believe that used for food

When I pointed out that he was ignoring the nine-person crew focusing on flood-relief, he admitted that this crew was doing better work than the gardening crews and soon he would visit the flood relief sites. Even though fully one-third of the members and the service at the site focused on vital flood-relief projects, the extensive final article only included a one sentence, eleven word, reference to flood relief. It is clear that his article did not seriously describe the flood relief work simply because such work might put the program in a positive light. Bluff road in Belleville hit by flooding of 1933; to prevent future flooding and stabilize streambank and roadbed; surveyed both sides of streambank, draw out survey work, removed trees that would interfere with stabilization work, with backhoe cutting ditches out and removing silt, ames steam run faster, run filter fabric on base of stream, place rocks on top of this, also did this in the fall. Gabion baskets galvanized aluminium several thousand feet, 4,000 feet

I made it clear to him repeatedly that AmeriCops was not a "jobs." program, yet his article repeatedly refers to it as such.

During our conversation, the reporter claimed he he has "spied" on our members during the day and that they were loafing, I challenged him to provide names or photos so that we could take action. He backed-off this challenge.

I repeatedly urged him to interview local elected officials or community leaders

who supported our project. He refused, essentially claiming that any leader in east. St. Louis would obviously lie to protect any program in East St. Louis.

He again challenged the need for gardens or tree planting in East St. Louis. I responded that AmeriCops-created community gardens often also reduce crime --- as ours did in Chicago --- and that a USDA study in Chicago proved both the environmental and economic benefits of urban tree-planting. He also chose not to use any of this information.

I also urged him to report on one of the sites best projects, a highly moving service which I witnessed first-hand. In a small-town visiting Centerville, Bluff Road, McNeil park, to AmeriCops, playground St. Phillips Church Bellevue, 15 7th and 8th graders,

29 Team - Bellevue Team is none

22 gardens --

Only one or two out of 22 no one using

Many of gardens in one producing

All but one has been turned over

One 1/2 acre --

Tomato, cabbage, collared greens, squash, green beans, peppers, okra, eggplant, cabbage, lettuce, turnups, tomatoes, spinach

Two or three wheelbarrows - the or four food apanties

Lesslie Bates Center 130 people fed

Spring, summer fall,
through Fall

Ran ad in East St. Louis Monitor --- paper out of \$75,000 --- citizens application 30

Or 35 people applied a-- people who have garden requested by Rev Davis

Selected 15 - sent letter out

Reverend Davis just wanted garden tilled-- just wanted seeds -- didn't want help

Had to public land --- church groups, boy scouts, menatl group

Secured rights to maintain and take care of it
We never agreed we would maintain the lots

Wet spring and early, hot July, residents not do this
12-15 gardens out of 21 - harvesting

Lovejoy is biggest garden - an acre -- feeding 150 to 200 people --- well over 100 people --- tilled garden twice, let them lay it out, provided with seeds, plants, mulch, and insecticide, fertilizers, kept grass down, create mulch maintenance, trained by horticulture council

AM Jackson Grade School - 1/3 acre -- from plans, Winter group of students -- 20-30 kids learned AmeriCorps Members, students come over at your greenhouse, same stuff at college, distributed to citizens around school

4-H Garden - 1/4 acre- managed by 4-H club, tilled, plan, weeded, played-out that garden

4-H club, public grade schools, high school, three gardens for ESL Mental health, granite senior center used greenhouse for stuff

Not picking up

10- Half are in Jones Park - Cutting trees, cutting them up and removing, dead and dangerous, 30 trees, if park had to pay for it \$700 dollars a tree

removing 30-40 trees, chainsaw

removed small tree from 1,000 feet of lake for scientific purposes and fishing

3-4 work on garden on campus

1-3 keeping flower beds, pruning, some mowing

Rest assigned to gardens, to campus, park, etc, AmeriCorps Members teaching mental health applicants how to work in garden

Cleaned-up 12 lots, not 8 ; 20 was goal

Put ad in paper, 50 request, publiclly-owned, or for publuc use
juknk, dead trees, garbage, removed trees

area area on some places, flowersd, trres

Planted 64 trees on campus,
50 shrubs, Campus used to community

5 flowe beeds, 6,000 folwers

Assiuited 15-20 acres

False Claim:

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Ignored church group

Money - Total cost?

\$75,000

45,000 salary, no one else hired
rest to equipment or supplies

283,000 in-kind

29 Members, started with 30

Started with 20, flood reaM

Flodd -relif work.

Weeds

Weeds in garden ireelavnt - nothiong

Okra lants placed late--- did not die

How much food grown and given out?

Ignored church group

Money - Total cost?

\$75,000

39,000 from Nov. 15- End 95

45,000 salary, no one else hired
rest to equipment or supplies

283,000 in-kind

29 Members, started with 30

Started with 20, flood ream

Weeds

Weeds in garden irrelevant - nothing

Okra plants placed late--- did not die

How much food grown and given out?

130 people benefited from food or produce

Have all basic equipment

Workers were in training during winter -- If they don't show up, they don't get

Got plants started on campus and Jones Parks -- Grew thousands of 3,000 -4,000,
tomatoes, peppers, cabbage, collards, watermelons, cucumber

Worked with school -

Worked with gardeners and met with lots - Met with over 150 people
Low plans for and garden plans

Transfer college blueprints and architectural drawings onto computer disks -using CAD
computer-aided drafting; professional drawing to scale, modernizing engineering
update by campus, tens of thousands to have

Planted trees in January 64 most in late Winter -- fed. < March
8 went on site investigations, measure sites, to prepare site plans for gardens in sun
a rain rain

Drew up landscaping

How many times sent home?

Sent home during summer because it's too hot --- During "heat alerts"

Sent home early - disciplined and sent home early, not paid when sent

8-4 normal hours

7-2 instead - no one left off at noon

Equipment Now: Pushcared, borrowed, or received in contribution

Equipment: Tractor with bush hog, tractor with a tillage, or bobcat, --- have borrowed
15 days worth and rented 17 days

Not paid for hours

102 and 103

What equipment is lacking?

No Lay-off: 15 Members reached their 1,812 hours will reach in August.
and of September
Current 9 are part-time

Rush: Partnership Newspaper - Not mistakenly learned it was placed in public land;
No trespassing sign there; not part of objectives

Leslie Bates; Kids pulled-up some plants, re-planted

Continuing to work on gardens because they lack equipment or supplies

How many days in the winter were in training or service?

15 gardens was objectives = really 21 gardens

More than eight - 20 lots, not including a gardens

Cleared out a small green house - $30 \times 60 = 1,800$ ft

No in operation, removed a dumptruck load of debris, removed brick floor up, replaced all the bricks, replaced all the beam work and replaced benches, removed rusted water system, new plastic, replaced cooling system, repaired furnaces

Functioning schoolhouse- use it for classes - horticulture--- all done during winter cooling system is done -- all done

Kenneth Hallpark (Jones Park) - $24 \times 96 = 2,300$ sq feet = cleaned up completely, took roof off, repainted wood supports, painted those new studs along the side; in process in re-paneling; produce stuff rather than but them

Small greenhouse of Community college used to start - cleaned-up and grew plant a, meersal

Never had to sell vegetables -- Told them they could sell them to WIC program -

Reverend Davis giving it to Parishioners ---

Did plan for it that tractors and backhoes not a problem -- not state on property

No money spent on gasoline

Of 30,000 of operations equipment

Frustrations, not "failures"

Director says he considers it a disappointment, all the equipment

How We Intend to Respond

a

Quoted taken January physical work outside, to December

08/04/95

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ACTIVITY REPORT

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Denis L. Habbid

Rt 1, Box 12

fatette, MS

39069

August 4, 1995

To: Jeane Bradner

From: Joel Berg

22 pages, including this cover

I thought you might want to see this information about the
USDA AmeriCorps project in East St. Louis and Belleville

STC-353-5343



UNITED
STATES
DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

August 4, 1995

Letter to the Editor
The Belleville News-Democrat
P.O. Box 427
Belleville, Illinois 62222

To the Editor:

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- * Claimed erroneously that the project did not have the required tools and equipment.
- * Confused the reality that the Members are successfully completing the program and thus officially terminating their term of service during the Summer with the false notion that they are somehow being laid-off.

The truth is that the AmeriCorps Members worked hard throughout the year providing vital services to the people of East St. Louis and Belleville. The truth is the project correctly spent the budget allotted to it. The truth is that the people of both Belleville and East St. Louis are benefitting greatly from AmeriCorps.

In our conversation, Mr. Pawlaczyk promised his article would include full coverage of the flood-relief work performed by the USDA AmeriCorps crew serving in Belleville. However, his lengthy article only included one sentence on flood relief. I believe that his article did not seriously describe the flood relief work for two reasons: 1) describing such obviously worthwhile work would undermine his assignment to prove AmeriCorps was a "boondoggle," and 2) focusing on Belleville --- where your paper's readers live --- would allow your readers to learn for themselves that the article was inaccurate.

Had the article been fair, it would have reported that the USDA AmeriCorps crew based in Belleville stabilized 4,000 feet of stream and land adjoining Bluff Road, which suffered from massive flooding in 1993. Among other things, the AmeriCorps Members surveyed the area, drew engineering charts, removed trees that would interfere with the stabilization work, cut out ditches and removed silt, and placed "filter fabric" and "riprap" in the stream to prevent future flooding and erosion. This service was performed far more cheaply by the AmeriCorps crew than if it had been performed by government employees or private contractors.

Mr. Pawlaczyk also failed to report a very moving story from my site visit to the project, which I related to him in our conversation. In June, I travelled to a project site Centreville, where the AmeriCorps Members were working to create a park on land that had been donated by a mother in memory of her son that had been recently shot. On that day, a mostly white group of about 15 volunteers from the 7th and 8th grades from St. Phillips Church in Belleville worked alongside the mostly African-American AmeriCorps Members from East St. Louis. Together, they constructed an entire playground for that new park. This day provided a inspiring testament not only to AmeriCorps' ability to bring people together across racial lines, but to AmeriCorps' success as boosting local volunteer efforts and empowering local communities.

The true facts are clear. AmeriCorps is cost-effective. AmeriCorps rewards work instead of welfare. AmeriCorps renews the spirit of community involvement that made this nation great.

I simply hope that when the *News-Democrat* covers this issue in the future, it reports the facts --- and only the facts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Joel Berg". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joel" and last name "Berg" clearly distinguishable.

Joel Berg
Director of National Service
United States Department of Agriculture

08/04/95 13:30

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ACTIVITY REPORT

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UNITED
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OF AGRICULTURE

AMERICORPS/USDA FAX

**TO: Belleville News-Democrat
Letters to the Editor**

**From: Joel Berg, Director of National Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture**

JB

4 pages, including this cover

Hard copy to follow in mail



UNITED
STATES
DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

August 4, 1995

Letter to the Editor
The Belleville News-Democrat
P.O. Box 427
Belleville, Illinois 62222

To the Editor:

The recent article by George Pawlaczyk --- and accompanying editorial and cartoon --- on the USDA-sponsored AmeriCorps project in East St. Louis and Belleville contained many serious inaccuracies and omissions.

Last Fall, your paper also ran a negative article on the project --- also by Mr. Pawlaczyk --- that inaccurately reported that the program started without the proper tools and that misquoted AmeriCorps Members. Subsequent to publication of that original story, my staff and I each made individual site visits to the project. We discovered first-hand that the project is "getting things done" while strengthening the communities, expanding educational opportunity, and encouraging personal responsibility.

When I learned a number of weeks ago that Mr. Pawlaczyk was preparing another story on the project, I called him immediately. Upon my request, he called me at home that Sunday and we spoke for over an hour. In our conversation, he admitted the bias of both himself and his editor, saying that neither of them personally believe that East St. Louis needs either more gardens or more trees.

It seemed clear in our conversation that he had made his mind up that the whole idea for the program was stupid and that his article would say so, regardless of the facts presented by myself or anyone else. Still, at a few points during our conversation, he admitted that he had misunderstood a few things about the program before speaking to me and that he would correct those issues in his article; unfortunately, his final article included almost all of his original, mistaken ideas.

For example, during our conversation, Mr. Pawlaczyk admitted to me that he knew that preliminary cost estimates leaked to the media by Congressional opponents of AmeriCorps were false, yet he included these numbers in his article as if they were fact. The truth is that each USDA AmeriCorps Member in Southern Illinois costs Federal taxpayers a maximum of \$21,000 per year, including a \$4,725 educational award to be used to pay for college or job training. This per member figure is \$6,000 less per year than the figure reported by your newspaper.

In addition, the article and editorial both:

- * Exaggerated the cost of the project by at least \$48,000.
- * Severely underreported the amount, the complexity, success, and the importance of the community service tasks performed.
- * Failed to report that food grown in the community gardens has been used to help feed hundreds of low-income families.
- * Incorrectly failed to describe the vital planting, outreach, and education service provided by the AmeriCorps Members throughout the winter.
- * Fabricated untrue stories that AmeriCorps Members were paid for quitting early on hot days.
- * Claimed erroneously that the project did not have the required tools and equipment.
- * Confused the reality that the Members are successfully completing the program and thus officially terminating their term of service during the Summer with the false notion that they are somehow being laid-off.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joel Berg". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Joel Berg
Director of National Service
United States Department of Agriculture

Dear Neighbor:

The East St. Louis Horticulture Council, a consortium of community groups, agencies, and educational institutions, will be working to improve at least twenty vacant lots and to establish at least fifteen community gardens throughout the city, over the next year. These projects will be completed through the Americorps National Service Program.

If you are interested in improving vacant property on your block or in your neighborhood, please complete the attached forms. The purpose of the program is to involve residents in activities which will enhance the physical condition of the community. Although Americorps has provided funds for staff to help with the program, the Horticulture Council would like to challenge residents to sign up a minimum of four neighbors to participate in the improvement projects. So, each project which is completed will involve at least five community residents.

In addition to establishing community gardens, residents may choose to build a simple vest pocket playground for kids, a grass covered open field, or some other modest improvement. Whatever your preference, please note it on the appropriate form along with the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of neighbors who wish to participate. You must also get permission from the owner of a property before any work is done. You may call 874-0312, the Operation New Spirit Office, to determine who owns the property in question. Once you know who the owner is, they must give written permission using the second form enclosed.

Please return this information as soon as possible. If you have any questions, please contact Rufus Williams or Don Wallace at 583-2514.

Sincerely,

Rufus Williams
Americorps Co-Director

Mission Statements

AmeriCorps/USDA

The Mission of the USDA AmeriCorps program is to engage a diverse group of Americans in working partnerships with communities to provide real and measurable service to meet environmental and human needs, while earning education benefits and building an ethic of service, responsibility, and citizenship.

East St. Louis - Lovejoy Environmental Program

The Mission of the East St. Louis - Lovejoy Environmental Program is to be the national model urban environmental program committed to service, community development, environmental awareness, education, and excellence through the building of a network of local, regional, and national partners dedicated to the rebirth of the East St. Louis - Lovejoy Metro area.

Madison - St. Clair County Flood Restoration

The Mission of the Madison - St. Clair County Flood Restoration Program is to be the national model flood restoration program committed to improving life along the counties creeks, streams, and other waterways through physical improvements, community understanding, and citizen participation with project members and our team of public and private partners.

YOUR MISSION

Each of us has a mission in life. Often we don't know what it is or have been told it is not something we can attain. As you begin today, your personal AmeriCorps mission may not be apparent. But in the days ahead you will find it and define it. It will be placed here and will replace these words. Because it each members mission and journey of fulfillment that gives us our essence, our soul.

Vacant Lot Improvement / Community Garden Sign-Up

Sponsored by: The East St. Louis Horticulture Council

Please fill in the following information if you are interested in improving overgrown vacant lots in your area.

=====

Your Name and Phone Number _____

Address _____

1. What would you like to do with the vacant land in your area?

2. If you are interested in developing a garden, is the land suitable for that purpose?

3. What is the address of the property?

4. Do you have permission to use the land? _____
(see attached form)

5. What is the name and address of the property owner?

6. How large is the piece of land? _____

7. Please describe the condition of the property? Was it ever used for commercial or industrial purposes? explain.

8. How many neighbors are interested in helping with this project? _____

9. Give the name, address, and telephone number of your neighbors who have agreed to help with this project. Try to list four.

Letter of Understanding

I (we) _____ as owners of
a certain property located at _____, East
St. Louis, Illinois do hereby permit the use of this property at no
cost by _____ for the purpose
of developing a (an) _____. The
use of this property is conditioned on returning this property at
the conclusion of use in an orderly manner. It is further
understood that I (we) shall be held harmless of any actions or
mishaps which may result from use of this property. I understand
that this approval is preliminary and that my (our) final approval
will be sought after a formal plan is proposed.

Agreed to this _____ day of _____, 19____ by

Owner(s)

User(s)