



Tuesday, July 20, 2004

AmeriCorps inspires other community service efforts

By **Dawn Pauli**, contributing writer

While a chapter in OU's history is closing as the AmeriCorps program ends in August, a new one is being written by OU's faculty, staff and students who are determined to keep community service thriving.

"It's sad to see the program go, but some things have a natural ending," said Carole Anne Ketelsen, program manager for AmeriCorps. "Along the 10-year road, we've been very successful in helping a lot of young children stay out of trouble, show them college life and introduce them to a lot of caring individuals."

The program, which provided educational enrichment to Pontiac youths inside schools, community centers, churches and housing projects, is ending for a number of reasons.

"There are so many factors involved, and it's not any one group or person or any one entity's fault, it's a combination of many things," Ketelsen said. "The amount of government funding continues to decrease, and a number of other funding sources have dried up over the years."

In addition, Ketelsen said the federal government also is looking at how long programs can exist. "We made the decision to end the program as opposed to the government telling us we had to, she said."

While the program officially ends in August, students will finish up their assignments through October.

One of the many organizations AmeriCorps works with is the 4-H program in Oakland County. This summer, AmeriCorps volunteers are working with youngsters to share the importance of good nutrition and physical activity.

"When we developed this partnership 10 years ago, it was a blessing because here were enthusiastic, creative, energetic college students who wanted to work with children. We put them together with the materials and connections we had, and together we made all kinds of magic happen in the city of Pontiac," said Julie Sciscowicz, 4-H program coordinator, Michigan State University Extension – of Oakland County. "We are very grateful to OU and all the efforts and the commitment they have made. They gave a real gift to the city of Pontiac. It was a very good thing, and we'll all miss that, but we're grateful for those years and all the OU students."

University encourages and supports community service

Oakland University's vision includes community outreach, and it's a requirement for some academic programs, such as The Honors College.

"While it's not a stated requirement, we encourage faculty to include community service in their courses," said Susan Awbrey, associate professor and vice provost of undergraduate education. "Oakland University's philosophy is that community service is an important aspect of student education, and we should provide a way for students to give back to their community."

Although the AmeriCorps program is ending, there are still Oakland University students who want to share their time and talent with the community.

"The philosophy and practices of AmeriCorps will not be in vain. Part of our mission is to provide community service opportunities in the Center for Student Activities. We will be filling the gap left by AmeriCorps in our office," said Jean Ann Miller, director of the Center for Student Activities. "We definitely have a commitment to do that, and we have a couple of ideas in the works."

Plans include developing a monthly community service activity and building on existing events such as the American Heart Association Heart Walk and Make a Difference Day.

A Volunteer Fair is set for Sept. 8 from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. in the Oakland Center's Fireside Lounge to match student volunteers with agencies.

"We're inviting agencies from the community to come to OU to recruit our students, they really like the opportunity," said Sarah Crampton, coordinator of student leadership development. "Agencies run the gamut, from working with children and homeless people to senior citizens and animals."

Last year, one floor in West Vandenberg Hall was dedicated to community service as part of the learning communities in the residence halls.

The demand is increasing for similar floors, said Jeff Frankowiak, graduate student and Vandenberg Hall director. He's working with Katie Miller, resident assistant, to add another floor in South Hamlin this fall.

"It's in its infancy, but interest has grown and we're hoping to do bigger and better things," Frankowiak said.

While community service opportunities are open to all students, those students who live on the community service floors will likely program and host events. Last year, 500 students from the residence halls attended or volunteered at the March of Dimes carnival.

"That is a lot, considering we have around 1,100 students living on campus," Frankowiak said.

A handful of OU student organizations also focus on community service, including Circle K, REACH: A Community Service Organization, and the OU branch of Habitat for Humanity. In addition, many of the Greek sororities and fraternities provide community service.

Celebrating AmeriCorps accomplishments

Ketelsen will remember the AmeriCorps program fondly, "Not only for the services we brought to the community and to children but for our college students at Oakland. It's been so much fun to watch them grow and develop, watch them take responsibility and figure out what they want to do with their lives."

"Some people think college students don't care about anyone but themselves. And every year, we had 40 students – full time college students – earning less than minimum wage. We had many, many caring college students who gave completely and totally of themselves, not only time and talent but their own money. They took kids on trips and bought them extra incentives they didn't get reimbursed for."

Ketelsen also saw OU's students grow in other ways.

"In some respects, the program accomplished to breakdown some of the racial barriers," Ketelsen said. "Typically, our membership was Caucasian in a primarily African-American community. We had core members learning about each other or the children working with someone of different ethnicity. We helped bridge some of those gaps."

A celebration is being planned for Wednesday, Nov. 17, to mark the end of the program. The event will be in the Oakland Center Banquet Rooms. The time and details will be announced at a later date.

"The whole university is invited and we're really hoping we can reach out to as many former members as possible. We want to celebrate AmeriCorps successes," Ketelsen said.

Ketelsen will guide the AmeriCorps program through its last few months, and then she will focus on her other responsibilities, including coordinating College of Arts and Sciences internships and co-ops.

"I will miss it – everyday we made a difference," she said. "There are not many jobs you can get the satisfaction of knowing what you did really made a difference to somebody else."

AmeriCorps Fast Facts:

A Decade of Service (1994-2004)

Total number of members over 10 years — 441

Total number of hours members served — 31,481**

Total number members serving second term — 56

Amount of education stipend awarded — \$646,650**

Amount of living wage paid out — \$1,369,880**
Total number of community service projects — 566**
Total number of volunteers — 7,437**
Total number of hours volunteers served — 83,470**
Total number of sites served — 32
Total amount of grant — \$3,359,708
Amount of money from OU — \$755,846
Amount of money from corporation (federal) — \$2,229,722
Amount of money from United Way — \$107,984
Amount of money from anonymous foundation—\$55,000
Amount of money from Skillman Foundation — \$77,735
Number of student contacts (enrichment) — 27,575**
Number of students tutored — 3,257**
Total number of children served — 30,832**

**Numbers for 2003-2004 are estimated

Total cost of operating the AmeriCorps program for 10 years — \$3,906,358 (This figure includes the total cost of the grant and the amount of educational stipend awarded.)

SUMMARY

While a chapter in OU's history is closing as the AmeriCorps program ends in August, a new one is being written by OU's faculty, staff and students who are determined to keep community service thriving.

Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Tuesday, July 20, 2004
Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Tuesday, July 20, 2004
Article Start Date: Wednesday, July 21, 2004