

Youth corps program provides an educational outdoor work experience

Community crews partner with regional agencies to enhance the environment

By Katherine Lacaze
Seaside Signal

The sound of shovels, axes and brush cutters interrupted an otherwise serene setting at Elk Meadows Park near Manzanita on Aug. 12. A small local crew from Northwest Youth Corps OutDoor Oregon Program was busy uprooting Himalayan blackberry bushes, Scotch broom and other invasive species.

Occasionally conversation or laughter would mix with the sound of power tools.

"We keep it lighthearted, but we work hard," crew leader and Seaside resident Jason Jones said.

Conceived in 2009, the OutDoor Oregon Program's first two years were funded by federal stimulus money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Program Director Tom Helmer said. Now the program is largely supported by project partners and grant money.

Crews completed concurrent five-week sessions, from June 15 to July 17 and from July 27 to Aug. 28. In addition to Seaside and Astoria, there were crews in Eugene, Salem, Corvallis, the Portland area and Coos Bay this year.

The two Clatsop County crews, from Seaside and Astoria, worked at locations along the coast from the Long Beach Peninsula to Nehalem. Their partners included the trust, the North Coast Land Conservancy, the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Elk Meadows project was undertaken in conjunction with the Lower Nehalem Community Trust.

The Five Guys

The "Seaside" crew consisted of Jones, Senekham and teens Daniel Stamp, 16, of Astoria; Jason Miller, 16, of Knappa; and Nolan Mathews, 15, of Astoria.

Calling themselves the "Five Guys," a play on the title of a popular fast-food chain specializing in burgers and fries, during the program they met at Seaside High School each morning during the five-week session.

The Seaside crew spent the first two weeks at Circle Creek near



KATHERINE LACAZE/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Jason Jones of Seaside was a crew leader for both the Seaside and Astoria crews from Northwest Youth Corps OutDoor Oregon Program this summer.



KATHERINE LACAZE/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Each crew worked for five weeks, concurrently, on projects in partnership with various public and nonprofit land management agencies.

Crew members invited in 2016

As an AmeriCorps grantee, the Northwest Youth Corps receives financial support to cover the cost of the program leaders.

One of the greatest challenges the program faces in the area is recruiting youth. Usually, the program tries to recruit 10 youth

for each crew, or five per team leader, but both local crews were under capacity this summer. That doesn't limit the type of work the groups can do, crew leader Justin Senekham said, but rather the amount of tasks they can accomplish on location.

For the upcoming 2016 seasons, Helmer said, they hope to better "spread the word" about the program.

To learn more about Northwest Youth Corps, visit www.nwyouthcorps.org/ or the organization's Facebook page.

The takeaway

For crew members, the program was intended to be an educational experience in addition to offering seasonal employment. Each work day included a 45-minute to one-hour educational segment using specific curriculum addressing outdoor education topics — such as forestry, geology, environmental science, weather patterns, plant identification and fish life cycles — as well as workplace issues like racism, sexism and conflict resolution. The program teaches transferable skills useful in any industry, such as creating a résumé, teamwork, punctuality and accountability.

"It's setting them up for future employment," Jones said.

In addition to academic credit and a \$1,000 stipend, the program offers incentives such as a \$20 per week bonus for attendance and \$20 per week bonus for worksite safety, so each participant can earn up to an additional \$200.

The Seaside crew members said land conservation and love of the outdoors played a role in their decision to participate in the program, but each had personal motivations as well.

For Mathews, the program gave him a chance to work in spite of his age. "It's kind of hard to get a job when you're 15," he said.

Miller said he was searching "for a job that looked interesting." He learned about the OutDoor Oregon Program, and found it similar to a program he enjoyed last year.

Stamp, who participated in OutDoor Oregon last year, said it was convenient for him to return, as the second session conveniently started days after a previous job ended. It provides "a different diversity than any other job," in terms of job activities and co-workers, he said. Those elements allowed the crew members — the Five Guys — to bond in an uncommon and memorable way.

"It seemed more like a 'brotherhood,'" Stamp said.

Helping Hands marks 14 years of supporting the homeless

Community members gather for dinner theater, concert

By Katherine Lacaze
Seaside Signal

Eleven years ago Helping Hands Reentry Outreach Center launched with the goal of changing public perception about the homeless. Since that time, the Seaside-based nonprofit has grown from operating one safe house to eight re-entry homes and a relief center for the homeless. They operate in Seaside, Yamhill, Lincoln and Tillamook counties.

These accomplishments were honored at the outreach center's event "Angels Among Us" Saturday, Aug. 22 at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center. The celebration, presided over by Executive Director Alan Evans, served as the kickoff for Helping Hands' "Everyone Has a Story" campaign.

"Every person that we meet has a story, and it's a painful, unbelievable story of sadness, heartache and lack of resources to change their life," he said. "We're hoping to change policy now on how communities deal with their homeless populations."

The campaign will use data compiled by the organization about the cost of programs and services and who is being helped, as well as videos of interviews with former clients. Evans said the campaign is a critical focus for the organization because it shows the community the true face of homelessness and might help "paint a picture of the possibility of a solution."

Local performer Miss LuRain Penny entertained the packed house with a cabaret-style presentation full of music and musings. Accompanied by Astoria musician and composer Peter Unander, Miss Penny performed songs based on her life experiences and a personal philosophy that encompasses the ideal of living a life uninvaded by anything except love, she said.

With 201 people in attendance, the Helping Hands surpassed its goal, Development Director Joyce Stuber said.

After Miss Penny's performance, Helping Hands was presented with two donations, \$3,000 from U.S. Bank Foundation and \$20,000 from Providence Seaside Hospital. Attendees also could make one-time donations or long-term commitments.

The convention center then was cleared and set up for a blues concert starring Junk-Belly, of Wenatchee, Wash. The concert was alcohol-free and open to the public at no cost. The Boneyard Horns also performed.

The dinner theater was sponsored by Providence Seaside Hospital, U.S. Bank and PacificCorp. The concert was sponsored by Awakenings by the Sea, the Hi-Tide Ocean Beach Resort and the Ebb-Tide Resort. Numerous community members and groups also contributed to the event.

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