



at the *Corps* of things

The Newsletter of the Los Angeles Conservation Corps • Winter 2004

Corpsmembers Kick Off 2004 in Big Ways

Hundreds of Young People Honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with LACC

Over 200 young people from across Los Angeles made the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. a day "on," instead of a day off on Monday, January 19, 2004, by assisting to clean up the homes of neighboring senior citizens with the Los Angeles Conservation Corps (LACC).

Ranging in age from 13-24 years old, the young people came from more than 15 middle and high schools throughout the City of Los Angeles and from LACC's own full-time programs. Together they removed tall weeds, bagged trash, cleared brush, cleaned alleys, removed bulky items and assisted with seniors' yards in neighborhoods in Council Districts 8, 9, 10 and 15. Some of the sites were warm and welcoming, like Mrs. Price's back yard (see photo). Others were overgrown alleys that had become dumping grounds for couches, stoves, tires, busted televisions and other hazardous waste.

In a ceremony following the service portion of the day, dignitaries from across the country

congratulated corpsmembers for their civic contribution and explained how their efforts honored the memory of Dr. King. Guest speakers included AmeriCorps Director Rosie Mauk from Washington, DC, Executive Director David Muraki of the California Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism from Sacramento, and local Councilmember Jan Perry, Councilmember Bernard Parks and Councilmember Martin Ludlow, a former deputy director of LACC.

The day made an impression on Carla Ayala, a ninth grader at John F. Kennedy High School and a member of LACC's Clean & Green program. She reports that after working on Martin Luther King, Jr. Service Day she realizes the importance of "being responsible and taking action now" instead of leaving community improvement up to someone else in the future.



Carla Ayala, LACC Clean & Green participant and ninth grader at JFK High



At work in Mrs. Price's yard



Cleaning an alley in Watts

Corpsmembers Recycle Like Champs at the Rose Bowl

Participants from two LACC programs pitched in to recycle at this year's Rose Bowl on January 1, 2004. More than 50 RACLA corpsmembers (ages 18-24), 20 Clean & Green students (ages 13-17) and 15 staff came together to get the job done. Their camaraderie resulted in the recycling of a record number of beverage containers.

Over 11,000 lbs. of glass, plastic and aluminum CRV beverage containers were collected from partying tailgaters before and during the big game and recovered from the rows of seats inside the Rose Bowl after the game. The secret to the corpsmembers' collecting success? In addition to rummaging through trashcans and combing aisles, they passed out bags for recyclables to fans who were more than happy to have corpsmembers carry away their empty cans and bottles.



This was the third year that RACLA corpsmembers worked at the Rose Bowl, thanks to Leslie Lucas of SCS Engineering who proposed that the City of Pasadena give corpsmembers a chance to see what they could do. The RACLA corpsmembers made a great first impression, and the Rose Bowl Operating Company has been inviting them back ever since. As the saying goes, the third time's a charm: due to the success of this year's event, LACC was recently awarded a grant by the California Department of Conservation to provide recycling at the Los Angeles Coliseum for the entire 2004 football season!

Until football season starts again, RACLA corpsmembers will be recycling at as many as 70 special and sporting events, including the LA Marathon, the Toshiba Senior Golf Classic, the SBC Telephone Golf Classic and the PGA Women's Golf Tournament. They will also be busy providing recycling services to businesses and municipalities, state and local parks and 41 schools, where all of the money made from recycling is returned to the campuses. This year RACLA plans to recycle and return more than \$22,000 to local schools! ♻️

MANY THANKS TO THE 2003 RUSSELL KANTOR SCHOLARSHIP FUND FAMILY MEMBERS

In November, generous community members showed they cared about making advanced education and training accessible to all young people in LA by contributing to LACC's Russell Kantor Scholarship Fund. Our deepest thanks to the following people for enabling the Corps to award 127 students with scholarships to pursue their dreams.

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A Message From Executive Director, Bruce Saito

Greetings -

I am pleased to present to our Friends of the Corps our latest issue of *at the Corps of things*. This quarter's newsletter focuses on a number of our service projects and service heroes.

The mission of the Los Angeles Conservation Corps has always been to provide quality work and educational experiences to young people. But the foundation and soul of everything we do is based on our service to Los Angeles and our country. In nearly 18 years of service, the Corps has produced hundreds of incredible service projects that were driven by thousands of youth and individuals committed to the basic values of service and giving of oneself, like Karen Giron (below), Da'Lana Walker (page 3) and Mr. John Van de Kamp (page 5).

These service heroes are truly at the core of everything we do!

Thanks for your continued interest and support,
Bruce



Bruce (L) with LACC Legal Counsel Mercedes Salomon, Esq. and Michael Camuñez, Commissioner of the Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism

Alumnus Spotlight: U.S. Army Sergeant Karen Giron

An alumna of LACC's Clean & Green program, 25-year old Karen Giron knows how to conquer a challenge. In 1994, Karen came to Los Angeles from Guatemala. The move was hard since she spoke little English, knew nothing about the culture and was only 15. Her first job, and introduction to LA, was working at the Corps. Karen found the program full of challenges and opportunities. She liked her supervisor and found earning some money of her own motivating. Karen now credits the work she did as a Clean & Green student supporting Adult Corps field operations with teaching her how to find her own voice and interact with people.

By 1997, Karen had successfully graduated from North Hollywood High School and had hopes of becoming a doctor. Sadly, her mother passed away before graduation. So Karen worked to put herself through Concord College to study to become a surgical technician. At one point, even though she was able to get a school loan, Karen was working three jobs to make ends meet and help support her 3-year-old cousin and her brother while they all lived with her uncle.

One of Karen's three jobs was working at a fast food restaurant. On a particularly rough day, a frustrated customer threw potatoes in her face. Another customer

witnessed what happened and offered Karen a new job -- with the Army. Karen decided to accept the Army recruiter's offer and within one month was on her way to Fort Jackson, Texas. Since then, her assignments have included six months in Iraq and three years in Germany.

Karen recently received a Certificate of Achievement for providing outstanding surgical care to more than 229 Operation Iraqi Freedom patients. Last year, she graduated as a Non-Commissioned Officer of the United States Army. Now stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, Karen works with young soldiers and assists in the hospital's operating room. Her advice to all young people is to "never give up. Try your best everyday." And when something doesn't go right? "You just have to keep going ... always think positive and continue to have dreams," Karen says encouragingly, "because if you really want it then someday they will come true."



LACC Alum Karen Giron proudly continues her service career with the US Army

Program Spotlight: Building Up LA (BULA)

The Los Angeles Conservation Corps' Building Up LA (BULA) program is the most prolific provider of after school programs at middle schools for the Los Angeles Unified School District's Beyond The Bell branch. Since its beginnings in 1994, BULA has come to operate on 17 campuses throughout the school district.

BULA's academic enrichment program is based on offering "clubs" for students in sixth through eighth grades everyday of the week from 3:00 – 6:00 p.m. Research shows that students are most vulnerable to both danger in their surroundings and engaging in at-risk behavior during this time frame. Consequently, LAUSD contracted with the LACC to create safe places for students to learn and play after school hours. Clubs offered at each school include: fine arts (sculpting, drawing), performing arts (dance, drill), digital arts (photography, video) and computers.

One of the things that makes BULA unique is the fact that it offers after school activities tailored to male students, whose options are usually limited by sports seasons. The most popular after school club with the guys is industrial arts, where students can choose a classic car to build. True to the mission of the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, each BULA club integrates personal development and academics into activities. For example, in the industrial arts club, students not only build models but also learn about design, mechanics and careers in the automotive industry. Several of the clubs also integrate environmentalism into activities, so students can learn how to live greener lives by gardening and recycling.

Since middle school students are hungry to try new things, BULA partners with other organizations to keep clubs fresh and students participating. For example, in partnership with World Fit for Kids and in conjunction with the NikeGo Fitness initiative, BULA offers students a fitness club complete with a physical trainer and nutritionist. Also, in partnership with the Hispanic Engineer National Achievement Awards Conference, BULA is helping pilot a new Viva Technology program where students can learn about pursuing science careers and get a chance to speak to engineers and scientists.

In addition to compelling activities, BULA has found that it's the people who serve as club leaders that really keep students coming back. All club leaders are students themselves, pursuing college degrees, and most are from the same communities as the schools they work at with BULA. Because they are locals and scholars, they are especially qualified as mentors and role models to the middle school students. Thanks in large part to their commitment, BULA will provide homework assistance and academic enrichment activities for 12,000 middle school students this year.

Staff Spotlight: BULA's Da'Lana Walker



Da'Lana Walker, Program Manager for LACC's Building Up LA program. 2004 marks Da'Lana's tenth year with BULA!

Da'Lana Walker, Senior Program Manager for Building Up LA, does not waste time. She teaches both BULA staff and students that "to get anything done, you just have to ask yourself how bad do you want it." Da'Lana has been serious about playing a role in BULA's success since she joined the program as an AmeriCorps Member in 1994. Since then Da'Lana and staff have collaborated with several other community-based organizations to provide the widest selection of after school activities possible to local middle school students. Da'Lana explains why: "They are at the age when their interests and likes change all of the time ... so you have to stay open to change and remain creative."

Da'Lana believes this innovation is the key to Building Up LA's longevity. "We are major trendsetters in the before and after school program industry because we seek what the need is by polling students on a regular basis." In 2004, BULA will also launch its first student leadership team to deepen staff's understanding of young people's interests and concerns. This new team is just one of the ways that BULA provides both its students and staff with ongoing opportunities for learning and personal growth.

A Los Angeles native, Da'Lana is an alumna of Foshay Middle School and Dorsey High School. She is also an AmeriCorps graduate and holds a bachelor's degree in Business Management. In addition to her studies and working, she is the single mother of a six-year-old son. "I tell my staff that the secret to not stressing out is time management and prioritizing." Da'Lana loves what she does and prides herself on being a change agent at the Los Angeles Conservation Corps. ♻️

Know of a way to Build Up LA?

If you can help us educate and entertain middle school students, please contact BULA Director Lynda Via at 213-362-9000, ext. 215. Some ideas for supporting students in LACC's BULA program include:

- Host a field trip at your place of business
- Teach students life skills like balancing a check book
- Share your knowledge as a guest speaker
- Lead a tour of an art exhibition

We look forward to hearing your ideas!



BULA students enjoying an LA Lakers game

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Corpsmember Spotlight: Jason Hayes

At only 17 years old, Jason Hayes is well on his way to becoming one of the men he learns about in the “Real Men Class” he attends at LACC’s EcoAcademy. Jason says the class has taught him about the importance of personal responsibility and the consequences that can result without it, like drug addiction and homelessness. He credits the impact of the class to its creator, Mr. Rickey Pitts, who speaks from personal experience as a former gang member. “Mr. Pitts tells us how it is,” Jason says.

Jason has had challenges of his own to overcome living in gang territory. When he first moved to Los Angeles, he tried attending Washington High School. After two weeks he got a job and took a few friends out to celebrate. While at lunch, some local gang members accused Jason of making derogatory comments about their neighborhood. As Jason tells the story now, he lowers his eyes and will only say that next he “got into some trouble.” After that day, gang members tried attacking Jason three times on his way to and from school.

Jason started to suffer from stress headaches and began struggling in school. He was ready to drop out when he met Mr. Pitts, who inspired him not to give up on his education and enroll at LACC’s EcoAcademy. The feeling of safety and one-on-one tutoring he received motivated him to continue his studies. “There is not a day you want to miss at this school,” Jason says.



Jason Hayes, 17, on break from “Real Men” class at LACC’s EcoAcademy

Since then, Mr. Pitts has encouraged Jason to serve as an advisor to the younger students. He takes being a role model seriously, and is focusing on earning his high school diploma and not getting in trouble by spending his free time in an after school study group and working at a Foot Locker store. Now, Jason confidently tells the younger students, “You have to get your high school diploma to know how much potential you have, and you have to get more than a high school diploma to show people you have more than high school standards.”

Recent LACC Program Highlights

Here’s what just a few of LACC’s programs and corpsmembers accomplished from October through December.

Clean & Green: provides middle school students with employment and leadership training while performing community and environmental service projects

- 221 students employed
- 474 trees planted
- 321,990 lbs. of litter and debris collected

Girls Today Women Tomorrow: provides mentoring activities, leadership training, teen pregnancy prevention programs, vocational training, college visits, team-building camping trips and community service opportunities for girls in East LA.

- 15 new community members committed to serve as mentors
- Began a mural project at Euclid Elementary School

Transitional Living Program: provides housing, life skills coaching, resource referrals and counseling to Adult Corps corpsmembers striving to become self-sufficient heads of their households.

- All 12 participants completed classes on HIV/AIDS education and testing, money management, cooking, self-defense and leadership skills
- 50% of participants received LACC Russell Kantor Scholarships to pursue advanced education and vocational goals



Board Spotlight: John Van de Kamp, Esq.

John Van de Kamp is one of Los Angeles Conservation Corps' longest serving Board Members. He joined the Board soon after the organization was founded and has served in various roles, including five years as President. Perhaps his call to serve the environment and the local community began during his middle school years at Trailfinders—a private outdoorsy school in Altadena with lots of camping, rock climbing and swimming in the icy Sierra lakes where he was inspired by school owner Harry James' lessons on "social consciousness." Whatever the reason, the Los Angeles Conservation Corps' Board of Directors has benefited greatly from Mr. Van de Kamp's conviction and devotion to the public life.

Mr. Van de Kamp's professional experience is more than impressive. After graduating from Stanford University's School of Law with a Juris Doctorate, John served in active duty as a National Guard enlisted man from October 1959 to April 1960. For six years after he worked as Assistant United States Attorney in Chief of the Criminal Division and Chief Assistant to the United States Attorney roles followed by a year as United States Attorney in the Central District of California in Los Angeles. In 1967 he moved to Washington, DC to serve first as Deputy Director and later as Director of the Executive Office for United States Attorneys. In 1970 he took on the role of Special Assistant to the President's Commission on Campus Unrest. He returned to the Central District of California in 1971 as First Federal Public Defender and was later elected as District Attorney for the County of Los Angeles. After eight years on the job, he was elected to the Office of Attorney General for the State of California.

During Mr. Van de Kamp's eight years as Attorney General, the Office took an aggressive approach on the environmental protection front. Under his leadership, the office sat in the forefront of efforts to minimize development's negative environmental impact on Lake Tahoe; championed full enforcement of the California Environmental Quality Act; was a primary defender of Proposition 65, the 1986 toxics initiative, in the courts; stopped mining projects and dams along rivers; and, went to court to fight off-shore oil drilling, toxic pollution of coastal waters and mining projects in coastal forests.

Mr. Van de Kamp was defeated in the 1990 California Democratic gubernatorial primary and left the office of the Attorney General in 1991. For the next five years, he worked as a Partner in the Los Angeles law firm of Dewey Ballantine, LLP and since 1996, has served Of Counsel. During the same year, he took on the role of President of the Thoroughbred Owners of California—a perfect match to his horse racing interests. His other public service roles include sitting on the Board of Directors of Lawry's Restaurants, Inc., the National Thoroughbred Racing Association, the Planning and Conservation League, Skid Row Development Corporation and, until last year, United Airlines.

When asked about his 17 years as an LACC Board Member, Mr. Van de Kamp noted, "What we provide is a valuable service to young people. The Los Angeles Conservation Corps is an organization that I am very proud to be associated with."

Executive Director Bruce Saito has had the honor of working with John since 1986. "Mr. Van de Kamp has always been the mainstay and backbone of the Corps. His wise counsel and commitment has created a solid foundation that has uplifted the lives of thousands of Los Angeles youth. The Los Angeles Conservation Corps will forever be indebted to John for his kindness and dedication to service."

A January 14, 1990, Los Angeles Times Magazine article noted a principle that has governed Mr. Van de Kamp's public life:

"He has held fast to the belief that the duty of a lawyer is to represent clients above causes and venerate the law above all."



2003 RUSSELL KANTOR SCHOLARSHIP FUND FAMILY MEMBERS

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Choose LACC as your Official LA Marathon Charity

Hundreds of young people work with the Los Angeles Conservation Corps (LACC) every day to keep our city clean and green by performing street and park beautification projects, recycling, planting trees and creating gardens at schools. Whether you are running, biking or walking the course, you'll see signs of LACC corpsmembers' work in Council Districts 1, 4, 8 and 10 ... you'll even see corpsmembers in person at Miles 7 and 13 cheering you on!

Help us provide these hardworking young people with meaningful environmental and community service opportunities by choosing LACC as your Official LA Marathon Charity if you are participating in the race. Or, if you're rooting from the sidelines, please consider sponsoring a young person who wants to be in the race but cannot afford the cost of participating.

To support LACC young people on and off the race course,
 please call Linda Gamberg at (213) 747-1872, ext. 308.

Thanks and enjoy!



Founded in 1986 by Mickey Kantor, the Los Angeles Conservation Corps gives urban young adults and teens a chance to serve their community through environmental enhancement and community improvement projects.

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