



Greening the North Bay, One County at a Time

By Marilee Eckert

In 1982, Conservation Corps North Bay (CCNB) was established in Marin County as the nation's first local, nonprofit conservation corps. Its mission is to develop youth and conserve natural resources for a strong, sustainable community. The concept is simple: If we harness the energy of youth to preserve and protect the environment, the entire community profits.

For the past 28 years, our organization has helped thousands of young people develop an ethic of service and community and advance toward their life and career goals while improving local parklands and communities, cultivating strong environmental leaders and promoting environmental sustainability. Every program we embark on preserves and protects our natural resources for safe, healthy, livable communities.

Participating corpsmembers are given education, training and leadership skills in growing, green sectors of the job market while developing a strong work ethic and gaining the satisfaction of giving back to their local communities. Corpsmembers receive on-the-job training and vocational education in exchange for their work in North Bay communities and public lands to increase recycling, construct and maintain trails and restore riparian and wildlife habitat.

Education is provided through the accredited John Muir Charter School in Cotati, which was designed specifically to meet the needs of high-risk learners who haven't earned high school credentials. Corpsmembers can also apply for the Americorps Education Award and earn up to \$5,350 per year toward higher education costs, such as tuition or educational training, or to repay qualified student loans. It's one of the few youth development programs that offers participants higher than minimum wage for their participation.

In all, CCNB volunteers and corpsmembers have performed nearly 3 million hours of work on 150,000 acres of public lands. Our environmental programs also provide a valuable service for land management agencies, homeowners' associations and nonprofit organizations. The work our crews perform includes ecosystem monitoring, habitat restoration and recycling (to name a few). If you haven't seen them scattered throughout the North Bay cheerfully doing their work, you've certainly seen the results of their labors in pristine trails, clear rivers and streams, fewer wildfires, reduced carbon footprints of local communities, as well as reduced crime in your neighborhood.

Expansion into Sonoma County

For years, Sonoma County leaders have sought to replicate CCNB's successful efforts in their own county. Thanks to a recycling expansion grant from the California Department of Conservation, 18 months of planning and the support of Sonoma County supervisors, local city council members, resource management agencies and community leaders, CCNB was able to add an operation in Cotati in late 2009. Since then, CCNB Community Recycling and Natural Resources crews have helped reduce the impact of climate change, divert waste from landfills and promote natural resource conservation by building and placing recycling bins throughout Sonoma County parks and at

local businesses. They've also led creek and trail maintenance, fire fuel reduction and flood control projects.

CCNB also helps "green" special events by providing recycling infrastructure, collection service and education on recycling and zero waste. We service large events and facilities such as the Harmony Festival, the Sonoma-Marin Fair and Infineon Raceway.

Currently, CCNB collects from 525 points and partners with California state parks, Sonoma County regional parks and Santa Rosa city parks, to name a few. In 2009, CCNB crews in Sonoma County have already collected and sorted approximately 197,000 pounds of recyclable materials.

This summer, CCNB added its Project ReGeneration summer youth program to make Sonoma County even greener. Through this program, sixth through ninth graders lead environmental service projects throughout the North Bay. Upon completing 100 hours of community service, they earn a \$500 scholarship to apply toward their further education.

Corps member success story

CCNB was proud to host its first Sonoma High School Graduation for 11 of its corpsmembers. Jay was one of those graduates.

He used to be a punk rocker and high school dropout. He came from a broken home and, at age 15, hopped a freight train for parts unknown. After years of drifting, drinking and violence, he found himself in a Santa Rosa jail for fighting with brass knuckles.

There are a lot of ways Jay's story could have continued after his release—some not so nice. Fortunately, he met up with CCNB. Despite many obstacles, Jay earned his high school diploma and natural resources certificate and went on to study at Santa Rosa Junior College while holding down two jobs. He recently earned a \$5,300 Americorps Education Award and plans to use it to pursue a degree in biology. Additionally, his hard work for CCNB and sponsors landed him a job working for a CCNB project sponsor immediately after he completes his commitment to CCNB.

Hire CCNB

It's not easy finding reliable, skilled, hard-working help these days. CCNB can help. Corpsmembers are trained to standards rare today and come to work not with a sense of entitlement but with a desire to earn their way. By hiring a CCNB crew, you're not only nurturing the environment but also encouraging hard-working young people in your community.

For more information, please visit our website at www.conservationcorpsnorthbay.org or call us at (707) 303-3069 or (415) 454-4554. Better yet, stop by our new location at 365 Blodgett Street in Cotati. We'd love to meet you.

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