

## Boots in the Forest

# CARL POWELL

By Jaimie Olle

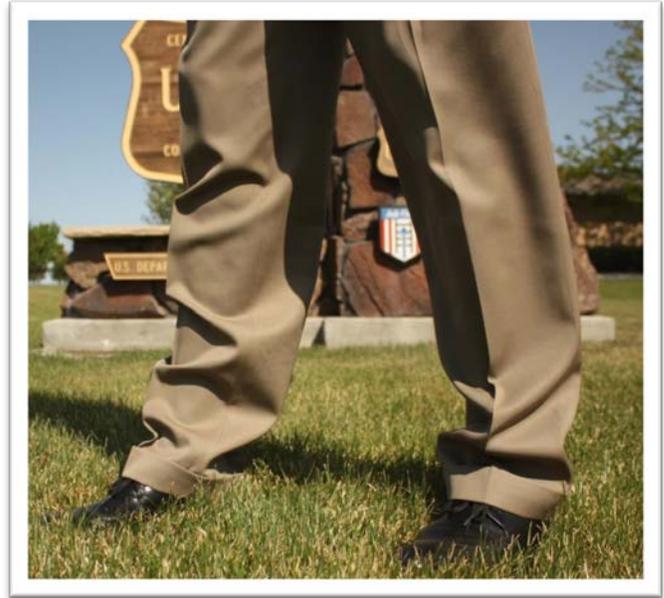
Not many people head to the park for a game of tennis and come away with a lifetime career. Carl Powell is the exception. Powell, the vocational development specialist and business community liaison for Centennial Job Corps, has been with the program for over 36 years, starting his career just a few months after college graduation.

Raised on the East Coast in a military family, Powell left the Washington D.C. area to attend and play basketball for Boise State University. Graduating from BSU with a degree in secondary education, Powell wasn't entirely sure what he wanted to do, but knew that he was interested in working with inner-city youth.

The summer after earning his degree, Powell, an avid tennis player, was hitting the courts at a Boise park one day. As fate would have it, a man approached and introduced himself as a human resources representative for the Bureau of Reclamation. He began chatting with Powell, and upon learning about his interest in working with inner-city youth, told him to meet at the park the next day, and he would take him to a place doing exactly that. The place was in need of teachers.

During this time, the Bureau of Reclamation managed the Centennial Job Corps, which was located in Marsing, Idaho, roughly an hour outside of Boise. Powell met at the park the next day and drove to the center with the man, wondering just what he'd gotten himself into as they passed mile after mile of sugar beet farms and dirt fields. Upon arriving at the center and meeting the students, Powell signed on as a math and reading teacher that very day.

Since then, Powell has held a plethora of positions at Centennial. After teaching basic math and reading, he took a position in recreation, eventually becoming the recreation supervisor. From there he wanted experience in the student living side of things, so he became a dorm supervisor and then manager. He next entered into counseling, the aspect of the work that he was truly passionate about from the beginning. Following this, he arrived at his business community liaison position five years ago, which is currently transitioning into the vocational development specialist. In both of these capacities, Powell helps students begin their integration back into the community following their completion of a trade program with Job Corps.



*Carl wears dress shoes on a typical day in the office, and he puts some mileage on them—walking all over the 50-acre campus throughout the day.*

“I tell students not to look at the physical part of being here, but to look at what you can gain from the experience and where you can go from here,” Powell says when encouraging and counseling students through the program.

With 126 sites across the nation and two new locations under construction, Job Corps received funds from the Department of Labor and provides vocational training for free to students between the ages of 16 and 24. Centennial, the only Job Corps site in Idaho, receives students from across the state, as well as Washington and Oregon. Most vocational programs take students between 12 to 18 months to complete. Centennial has an 86 percent graduation rate, with some notable success stories, including Idaho Supreme Court Judge Sergio Gutierrez and computer engineers at Microsoft.

“The best part about all of my years at Job Corps is the success stories,” affirms Powell. “We’re planting the seeds and it’s great to hear the success stories after seeing students struggling when they arrive here.”

Originally located in Marsing, the site’s current facility, built 17 years ago, is now in Nampa, a suburb of Boise. The Boise National Forest took over its management from the Bureau of Reclamation. The Forest partners with the center for trainings and opportunities, including the development of a wildland firefighting course and fire camp crew training.

Powell spends much of his time working with students on their resumes and providing assistance throughout the job-searching process. He attends meetings in the community to engage businesses and organizations with the center. One of the best ways for businesses to be involved is to serve as a work-based learning site, where students can fulfill internships in their area of study. Powell also helps students complete advanced training packets, which allow those who qualify to apply to additional educational programs, either within Job Corps or externally. He plans the monthly graduation ceremony and works to open a bank account for every student, as they receive a bi-monthly stipend.

Perhaps most importantly, Powell serves as a counsel for students, both as part of his job and simply because he cares. Walking through campus, he seems to recognize every student. He congratulates one on passing her nursing certification and another for enrolling in the military. He asks one student why he’s looking forlorn and pesters another to make sure he’s headed for college like he’s promised since he’s just completed his program. He jokes with a few and nearly every student gives a wide grin and enthusiastic “hello” as he passes by them. It’s easy to see he’s making a positive impact in so many young lives.

“Working for Job Corps really helps to put things into perspective, both in how I raised my own children and working with these students,” Powell reflects on his many years at Centennial Job Corps. “We’re helping students through a part of their lives—touching young adults’ lives. We get to be kind of like an adopted parent even though we don’t always get to see the impact until years down the road.”