

Workforce Training for America's Disconnected Youth

BY NATALIE BARTLEY

JOB CORPS HELP RESORTS GET A JUMP ON SKI AREA, NATIONAL FOREST PROJECTS

Ski resorts are always looking for ways to recruit workers who are conscientious, energetic, and enthusiastic about the snowsports industry. The Forest Service Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers (JCCCCs) might be one way to help fill the bill. With a focus on training students in employability and interpersonal skills, developing internships, and placing students in employment at a variety of businesses, JCCCCs are forging relationships with the ski and snowboard industry. It's potentially a beneficial arrangement for all partners.

The program is designed to train underserved youth with critical job skills, said Antoine Dixon, the former national director of the Forest Service Job Corps. "The conservation projects Job Corps students undertake on public lands are valuable, hands-on work experiences, and they provide exposure to career pathways in the ski industry," Dixon said. "Job Corps partnerships with ski area owners and operators are a win-win for the students, for their communities, and for the ski industry."

CORPS HISTORY

The Job Corps has a long history with the Forest Service and inadvertently

the ski and snowboard industry. In the 1930s the original Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) grew out of the New Deal program initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt during the Great Depression era. The CCC work relief program (which lasted from 1933 to 1942) was designed to create jobs and engage a labor force of unemployed young adults on federal, state, and local government properties.

In the New Deal CCC program, young men lived in work camps in the forests, some of which were reclaimed mining and timber camps. The men cut trails, built bridges, constructed lodges, and made roads. Much of their work



is still visible and actively used today. Vermont's Stowe Mountain Resort was developed on ski trails cut by the CCC in the 1930s. At Timberline Lodge and Ski Area in Oregon, the historic lodge on the south slope of Mount Hood is a National Historic Landmark from the 1930s CCC era (and currently accommodates overnight visitors).

JCCCCs share roots with the CCC. The Job Corps came into being in 1964 as a result of the Economic Opportunity Act, modeled after the Depression-era CCC. "Like its predecessor, the Job Corps program has turned around the lives of youngsters at risk by providing education, training, and a connection to the National Forest Service lands through conservation," said Alicia Bennett, public affairs officer at the USDA Forest Service Job Corps national office in Golden, Colorado.

In partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor, the Forest Service operates 28 co-educational JCCCCs. The centers span seven Forest Service regions, 22 forests and grasslands, and 18 states. Another 97 Job Corps centers are under various contracts with other organizations.



► Carpentry students with the Columbia Basin Job Corps complete repairs on the historic 1936 Ski Hill Lodge in Leavenworth, Washington.

COURTESY OF COLUMBIA BASIN JOB CORPS CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CENTER

Forest Service Job Corps centers assist in conservation efforts. Each center is associated with a national forest. For example, the Weber Basin JCCCC in Ogden, Utah, works with the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest. The Collbran JCCCC in Collbran, Colorado, interacts with the Grand Mesa Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests.

PROGRAM OPTIONS

Carl Powell, business community liaison at the Centennial JCCCC in Nampa, Idaho, said the centers offer three different opportunities to businesses in the community. One is a Work-Based Learning (WBL) experience, where students are placed in an internship or service learning situation. A second option is to hire a student with the skills a business needs. The third option is a Remote Projects Agreement located on a national forest where students gain practical experience while the ski area receives a cost-effective upgrade to its buildings, environmental restorations, or natural resource improvements. Local businesses approach their nearest JCCCC when they're looking for interns or employees with a particular skill set.

The training program for students at JCCCCs can last up to two years, with an option of remaining for a third year of advanced training. During that time, each student gains work experience through the required WBL. Students spend 160 to 240 hours (generally four to six weeks) at small businesses or corporations where they apply their vocations in actual job settings. For each student the employer provides direct supervision and supplies a mentor. The employer assists the student in gaining technical, career, and academic skills. Lastly, the employer documents the student's achievements and competencies.

"We train our young adults, put them in the real world to apply their skills, then bring them back to the center," said

Powell. After the WBL, the center helps the student identify successes and challenges, and then fine-tunes the student's work skills before graduation.

Powell said the centers offer various skills training and trades that fit with the ski and snowboard industry, including culinary arts, business management, construction, office management, computer technology, electrical technology, and healthcare.

Students are ages 16 to 24 and come from low economic, disadvantaged, and at-risk settings. Many possess a high school degree or a general equivalency diploma (GED). If they do not, each JCCCC offers the GED.

Any previous misconceptions about hiring at-risk or disadvantaged youth tend to fade quickly, Powell said. "The feedback we normally get is that the employers are pleasantly surprised about how the students performed."

A STUDENT GOES TO WORK

Jarrett Fields, 23, enrolled in the Business Administration and Clerical program at Fort Simcoe JCCCC in White Swan, Washington, from January to November 2012. Fields serves as an example of the young trained labor pool accessible through JCCCCs. His mother suggested the program to him because he was having difficulties finding useful employment in Portland, Oregon. "I was on and off the streets for the majority of my time there, and my employment history was so here and there... nothing was working out," he said. "There was just too much competition for employment."

JCCCCs develop not only the students' technical trade skills and educational skills but also the students' social skills and employability. "I never had a problem building a rapport with anyone from any walk of life; however, it wasn't in a manner that benefitted me in the

workplace," Fields said. "Job Corps really helped me meet in the middle and understand how to positively and professionally interact with others in a productive manner in the work environment."

Fields summarized the benefits of the JCCCCs, mentioning things that many of us take for granted: "Job Corps gives you a place to sleep, food to eat every day, and training in the career field of your choice, then assistance finding a job in that field," he said. "You get \$1,000 to \$1,200 start-up money, so once you find a job you can buy yourself work clothes and start paying rent."

Now employed as a front desk clerk at the Summit Inn at Snoqualmie Pass in Washington, Fields said the greatest challenge is in the work itself—but for all the right reasons. "I always want to make sure every guest coming in gets the best and cleanest room we have to offer, in addition to simply enjoying their stay."

REMOTE PROJECT AGREEMENTS

One example of a mutually beneficial project is the improved Ski Hill Lodge at the Leavenworth Ski Hill in the Cascade Mountains of Washington. This JCCCC Remote Project Agreement was a partnership between the Columbia Basin JCCCC in Moses Lake, and the ski area within the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest near Leavenworth. In 2011 the carpentry and painting students took on the task of preserving this historic building originally constructed by the CCC in the 1930s. Twenty JCCCC students and their instructors spent some 450 hours renovating the lodge, which entailed removing the deteriorated shingle roof and completing extensive repairs to the building. Before starting the project students earned the scaffolding certification at their center, ensuring that they knew how to set up and work safely at heights.

Another interesting partnership that differs from a Remote Project Agreement, yet furthers youth involvement in the ski and snowboard industry, is the annual event with the National Brotherhood of Skiers (NBS). Students from the Pine Ridge JCCCC in Chadron, Nebraska, took part in the NBS 40th Anniversary Summit in Aspen-Snowmass Ski Resort in Colorado from February 24 to March 1. Pine Ridge is one of the most culturally diverse of the various centers. Students at the event learned about career options in the ski and snowboard industry by shadowing resort employees, including childcare assistants, lift attendants, event coordinators, lift operators, and guest service attendants. And of course the students skied and snowboarded. The next NBS annual event will be at Sun Valley Resort in Idaho February 22 through March 1, 2014.

GETTING IN ON THE ACTION

Human resource departments at ski and snowboard areas and summer mountain recreation areas interested in accessing Job Corps students can initiate the process by contacting the JCCCC nearest your area (visit www.jobcorps.gov/centers.aspx.) Each center works with interested employers to determine a good fit between the job requirements and students. Center personnel can also guide the ski area through the planning process for a Remote Project Agreement.

JCCCCs programs are in motion year-round. Consider using this excellent resource when hiring summer and winter staff, identifying a construction or natural resource renovation project, or creating job internships through your local JCCCC. Not only does the program provide a strong potential worker pool, it's a way for the snowsports industry to benefit society by reaching out to young

adults who might not have snowboarded or skied before because they couldn't afford it or were intimidated by the homogenized face of skiing. The JCCCC programs help break down some of those barriers while bringing more young adults into the realm of the resort experience. By all accounts, working with a JCCCC is a solid investment in the students'—and the industry's—future. ■

For further information, contact Alicia Bennett at the USDA Forest Service Job Corps National Office, 740 Simms Street, Golden, CO 80401-4702, 303-275-5934 or at adbennett@fs.fed.us.

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