



April 2012

MVP Highlights

Quarterly Newsletter for the Maine VISTA Project



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Maine Commission for Community Service

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Martin Luther King Jr. Day asks individuals every year to “make it a day on, not a day off” and Maine VISTA project members certainly did just that! Here are some stories from and about MVP’ers about what they did on their day ON!

“Walking in the Light” on MLK Day

Kerrie Keller

Community service is always in fashion, and this was especially clear on the runway at “Walking in the Light: A Charity Fashion Show & MLK Day of Service Event.” This collaborative community project was hosted by Catholic Charities Maine (CCM) at One Longfellow Square in Portland on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day, January 16, 2012. The evening of style, service, and education featured thirty-six diverse community members modeling fabulous thrift store outfits from the CCM Portland Thrift Store. The event drew attention to the community need for affordable winter clothing and the Thrift Store’s mission to support this need. Gently-used winter clothing donation items were collected at the door (in lieu of admission) to replenish the store’s supply. (Sales revenue from the Thrift Store directly supports CCM’s social services programming statewide.) Over 150 people attended the event, and over 450 items were received—more than double the target goal!

The event was organized primarily by Kerrie Keller, AmeriCorps*VISTA and Director of Volunteers at Catholic Charities Maine, with support from six other VISTA members from the Maine VISTA Project and numerous CCM staff members. Local middle and high school students were also involved in planning and producing the event, and they were able to learn more about further education and training opportunities in the fashion industry.

Community partners who donated goods and services include local designers (Kyle Poissonnier of Elykssor Clothing and Jill McGowan of The Great White Shirt), Portland Post Production, the Portland Phoenix, and the Maine Mall. The event was also made possible in part by grant funds from the Maine Commission for Community Service (MCCS) and the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS).



Model Volunteers take the stage!

In the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., all attendees were encouraged to reflect on their own “styles of service” and “dreams for the community” in the evening’s interactive activities. The results will be displayed at the Thrift Store and may inspire future service projects in Greater Portland.

Watch the video from the fashion show here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwo6qiDmqxg>

Martin Luther King Day and “Rum, Riot and Murder”

Eileen Buzzello

It was my first week as a VISTA leader, and I was looking for a MLK Day project to participate in. I came across some information about a Mock Trial being sponsored by the Game Loft in Belfast. The trial was set in 1860 in Nurumbega County, Maine, and was based on actual Maine history. It focused on issues of immigration, ethnic tensions, temperance, and politics in Maine at that time, and more than 40 teen and adult volunteers were expected to participate. I sent off an email to the organizers to see if there was anyway I could help. What I had in mind was helping set up, serving food, helping with props, or



something along those lines. Instead, I got a phone call the next day asking me to participate in the trial as the defense attorney for the man accused of murder!

Less than a week later I was in Belfast participating as defense attorney in a trial where a man was wrongfully accused of murder – not in small part because of being Irish and selling liquor during a time in Maine’s history

when that was prohibited. Up to that time I knew very little about Maine history, being a transplant from Nebraska, but I learned a lot in a short few days. I got to conduct witness interviews with several of the role-playing game players who carried their assigned roles into the trial. The courtroom was rowdy, and the jury was made up of my client’s peers – many of whom shared the prejudices of their community. Nevertheless, we convinced all but one juror of my client’s innocence – resulting in a hung jury and acquittal. It was a great experience, and the best MLK Day project I’ve ever been involved with.

5210 Mural Redecorates the YWCA

Van Beckman

My volunteer work for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service, in addition to allowing me to serve my community more directly, also provided a unique opportunity for my Let's Go efforts. Since I was helping to redecorate the front interior of the YWCA of Central Maine, which happens to be one of our major Let's Go sites (and is also the building which houses Healthy Androscoggin), I casually asked the director of the club if she'd be open to creating a 5210 mural. She loved the idea, and so I submitted some artwork to the VISTA organizing the event who did a great job of sketching it on the wall. For the service event I helped three of the disadvantaged youths participating to paint the mural themselves, and they did a fantastic job.



“Sunday Supper”

Genna Cherichello

The MLK, Jr. Day of Service Sunday Supper was truly a community event, created and enjoyed by partners across Maine. With a presentation by 4-H Aldermere Achievers about their trip to Kentucky and attendance by many FoodCorps members and some of the youth they work with, the afternoon at Sheepscoot General Store in Whitefield was enjoyed by current AmeriCorps*VISTAs, AmeriCorps Alums, 4-H youth and parents, and members of the extended community. We ate delicious food, we learned about new projects, and we completed the sentence, "I have a dream..." related to our desires for the Maine food system.





AmeriCorps Week “Works”

On March 10-18, AmeriCorps members all over the nation celebrated AmeriCorps Week. The theme this year, AmeriCorps Works, communicated the value and effectiveness of AmeriCorps—for the recipients of service, the Members, and the larger community/nation.

Here are some highlights of what the MVP team did to celebrate the week:

Twelve members of our team participated in the Maine VISTA Project Photo works project. Each member was asked to create a sign to illustrate the impact they’ve made in the community (utilizing a template created for all members) as a part of the national photo works project “AmeriCorps Works: Empowering Communities to Get Things Done.”

Two of our members, Monika Pardon and Richard Higgins, were featured on the VolunteerMaine blog! You can read Monika’s blog on her role as a VISTA at Southern Maine Agency on Aging at <http://bit.ly/HhoKNr>! You can read Richard’s blog post on how AmeriCorps can help advance Service-Learning in the state at <http://bit.ly/wEzbS9>!

Kerrie, Emily, Molly, Caleb, Jen, and Rob participated in a video project. Each member was interviewed and asked about their VISTA experience and what being a VISTA means to them. Watch the amazing video at <http://bit.ly/HSUEzb>!

Van Beckman also created a video. Watch what Van had to say about his VISTA experience at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NY-RjbOpY0g&feature=youtu.be>

Peter MacArthur submitted an editorial to the Bangor Daily News for AmeriCorps week which was picked up nationally by the Pentagon Office of Warrior and Family Support. Follow the link <http://bit.ly/wCo1s0> to read what Peter had to say about his role in helping veterans and making a difference through AmeriCorps!

Katie Richardson also sent in an editorial to the Mount Desert Islander. View the clipping from the newspaper at <http://bit.ly/I7UkYp>!

AmeriCorps Photo and Video Contests!

During AmeriCorps Week, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) also kicked off the 2012 AmeriCorps Video and Photo Contest. The contest, which runs through July 1, asks current AmeriCorps members and alums to submit videos or still photos demonstrating the theme of AmeriCorps Works. Prizes range up to \$4,000 for the winning video. More information is available at the contest websites at: <http://americorpvideo.challenge.gov/> and <http://americorpphoto.challenge.gov/>.





AmeriCorps Member Conference

The annual Maine AmeriCorps Member Conference at Thomas College in Waterville brought together 125 AmeriCorps State/National and VISTA members from across the state who serve in their communities. The day began with lessons on leadership from Meredith Jones, President and CEO of the Maine Community Foundation, whose dedication to public service was strengthened during her VISTA year in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1964. The AmeriCorps members were able to choose from fifteen workshops presented by their peers with topics ranging from issues affecting Maine’s Veterans today, promoting stewardship in non-profits, and re-thinking service through restorative practices. Members also participated in networking activities to further develop their knowledge and connectedness. Through the information received during the conference, members are better equipped to go back into their communities and continue their dedicated service through AmeriCorps.

Funding from Unexpected Places

Genna Cherichello

Through my work with the Real Food Institute of Midcoast Maine, I met the President of the Waldoboro Business Association. She lives in the same town as me, and we carpoled to a meeting together back in November. During this carpool, we got talking about the kinds of projects, events, and activities we would both like to see in Waldoboro, and she invited me to the WBA monthly meeting. While I was there, I introduced myself and the mission of my VISTA assignment, and by the end of the meeting, they had all invited me to speak at the Waldoboro Business Association Annual Meeting

where over 40 town businesses were in attendance. I inquired about whether there were any food- and farm-related businesses who were interested in participating in a fledgling job shadow/internship program I have in mind, but I also mentioned the need for funding for a summer program at Medomak Valley High School with the Heirloom Seed Project. Within five minutes of my speech ending, one person came up to me and told me that they would anonymously donate the entire sum I requested! Onto planning!

Community Partners for High School Students

Amy Nigen was featured in “School Talk”, a newsletter of RSU 54/MSAD 54, highlighting the work she does to promote Extended Learning opportunities in the district:

“As director of the After School Program at both SAMS and SAHS, Ron Bonnevie has been a familiar face for the past three years. This program, funded by a 21st Century Grant, has been very successful. Its goals include academic assistance, health and welfare, and cultural and social development. Last year, one hundred twenty students from these activities by attending thirty or more afternoons. This year, in addition to directing the program, Mr. Bonnevie coordinates an exciting new introduction called Extended Learning Opportunities or ELOs. Funded by a Nellie Mae grant, the ELO program involves an effort to teach students in a new and relevant way, as well as assist them in building relationships with their communities. Real life experiences, through project-based learning, provide opportunities to gain new skills in a chosen field of interest with a community partner and an overseeing teacher. For example, an art student may partner with a pottery studio, or culinary student may work in a bakery or restaurant. (continues on page 5)



(continued from page 4)

ELO assignments supplement classroom work and ELO may provide between one quarter and one full credit towards graduation. Local community partners who may want to provide “hands on learning experiences for students who have a real interest or passion in a particular area” are encouraged to contact Mr. Bonnevie at the High School

Working with Mr. Bonnevie is VISTA member, Amy Nigen. Ms. Nigen’s job is to further community relations by connecting with people from local businesses and other organizations. She attends and schedules meetings, networks, and supports school staff through researching and providing relevant materials and contacts.

For example, Ms. Nigen might be involved in arranging connections for a student interested in music or in truck driving by identifying appropriate local adults in these fields. As an AmeriCorps VISTA representative, Ms. Nigen’s work focuses on building capacity with self-sustaining programs, eradicating poverty, forming community partnerships and encouraging community service. She added that she hopes to “make sustainable changes by connecting people with schools as community partners to help prepare youth for the future.”

Yvonne Bollenbacher is the third member of this innovative team. Ms. Bollenbacher is involved with the Great Strides Rural Education Corps of the Northern New England AmeriCorps Program placed in Middle and High Schools in rural Maine. She works directly with the students through mentoring programs, service learning opportunities and outreach to the community. She is also on the activities staff of the After School Program.

Together, these three people are helping students find expanded, relevant and rewarding ways to further their education. Both the students and members of the community will benefit by increased community service, partnerships and experiences.

Upcoming dates

April 5

March reports due

Submit your monthly reports in On-Corps

April 20

“Life after VISTA” Training in Portland

April 20-22

Global Youth Service Day, various locations

Various Activities

FMI contact [Richard Higgins!](#)

April 22

“Dig Into Earth Day!”

FMI contact [Genna Cherichello!](#)

May 5

April reports due

Submit your monthly reports in On-Corps.

May 15-17

MVP Breakout Calls

Veterans- May 15 @ 10am

Education- May 16 @ 10am

Vol. Mgmt/Other- May 17 @11am

June 12-14

MVP Breakout Calls

Veterans- June 12@ 11am

Education- June 13 @ 11am

Vol. Mgmt/Other- June 14 @11am

July 26

Mandatory MVP Training

Location TBD

Timekeeping is due on:

April 7, 21

May 5, 9

June 2, 16, 30

Paydays:

April 13, 27

May 11, 25

June 8, 22

The next issue arrives July 2012. Be sure to send your stories to Erin or Eileen to share your news!