

EMPLOYMENT TRAINING



Martha Corrozi Narvaez, associate policy scientist at the University of Delaware's Water Resources Agency (right) helps plant Irls in the wetlands during a Wilmington Green Jobs program. It focuses on environmental fields to help students ages 14 to 18 develop skills they will need to work as professionals in any field. ROBERT CRAIG/THE NEWS JOURNAL

FRESH AIR START

Jobs are designed to inspire

By Cori Anne Natoli
The News Journal

Wilmington high school students and a few from the suburbs set aside their Xbox games and denied countless distractions from other digital gadgets for six weeks this summer and instead scored an early edge on their future.

The opportunity was more a chance to join the City of Wilmington's Green Jobs Program, a six-week, hands-on environmental work and professional development experience for the 14- to 18-year-olds. They also were paid.

Organizers hope the deci-

sion - and the experience - will be enough to separate them from the pack when it comes time to begin their careers. Merely participating keeps teens off the couch and the streets, while exposing them to a potential path with a promising future.

Green Jobs was launched by the city and Martha Corrozi Narvaez, an associate policy scientist for the Water Resources Agency at the University of Delaware. She has coordinated the growing summer program for the past three years.

Throughout the course of the program, which wrapped up Friday, interns were exposed to environmental challenges, agriculture, removing invasive plants, weeding and planting gardens on First State farms and wildlife refuges. The program also

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Hibiscus grow among purple loosestrife, a non-native but attractive plant, in the Urban Wildlife Refuge on the Wilmington Riverfront. Green Jobs interns helped remove the loosestrife and plant Irls. ROBERT CRAIG/THE NEWS JOURNAL

Jobs: A chance for urban youth to build a resume

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included a one-on-one mentoring component, resume building, career exploration, aquatic life discovery and even surveying mussels in the Brandywine Creek. The work filled their days, rain or shine.

The first year, eight interns were chosen, then nine the next, and 10 this year. Still, there's room to grow the green-friendly group if its leaders can secure additional funding to help pay the youngsters minimum wage for 25 hours a week next summer.

"No matter where they go, no matter what field they go into, they can put this on their resume and have something concrete to talk about and credentials," Corrozi Narvaez said. "Everyone has a resume. We basically say: we're going to start their resume and they may just have their education and this job. But it's a starting point and a living document and different skills to set them apart."

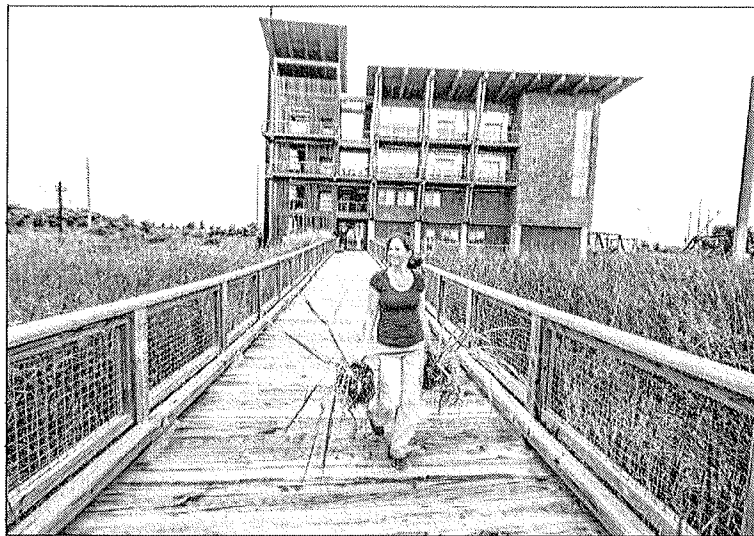
The interns are responsible for earning a paycheck, working on a team and completing tasks from beginning to end, she said.

"They have to be versatile and ready to do what we ask of them on a whim," she said. "So many studies and statistics show the benefits of children getting out in nature. It's about seeing there's more to a job than just working at a fast-food place flipping burgers. There's so much more you can be doing and getting paid for."

The program is focused, but not exclusively, on city youth.

"The thought is that there are a lot of youth in the City of Wilmington that are not exposed to nature and the environment in ways they are in this program," Corrozi Narvaez said. "They may be playing outside all of the time but not mucking around a creek or in a lab looking at mussels or going canoeing in the Christina. So almost every idea is that everything they are exposed to in the program is something unique, new to them."

Call it horizon broadening, purposeful intervention, an early edge. In all cases it seems to be having an impact for the interns, 70 to 80 percent of



Martha Corrozi Narvaez carries plantings through the Urban Wildlife Refuge on the Wilmington Riverfront during the Wilmington Green Jobs program. ROBERT CRAIG/THE NEWS JOURNAL

whom are Wilmington residents. The remaining are from the suburbs, including Steven Maile.

"I like to be outside versus inside behind a screen," said Maile, from Bear, a first-timer in the program. "At 17, it felt really, really great and gave me this good feeling I don't know how to describe. It gave me a purpose working for something I need, or something I want, and gave me the experience I will need in the future. I guess overall I know it helped people and the environment too, and that made me feel good."

The experience was eye-opening for Maile, from planting seeds in urban gardens and visiting a nuclear power plant, to learning the impact humans have on the environment – and composting on a farm.

Was it the trip to UD to study GPS mapping, trail restoration and clearing at Bellevue State Park, or the fact that it was his first real job?

Johnathan Tucker can't be sure. But one thing he is crystal-clear on is the value of the experience.

Eating, sleeping, Facebook and Twitter. That's how Tucker



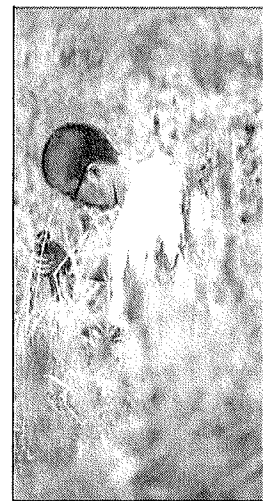
Martha Corrozi Narvaez works with Jemalaine Smith, wearing hat, and Jaimir Holloway removing invasive purple loosestrife in the Urban Wildlife Refuge.

says he would have otherwise spent his summer vacation. Instead, he took an early morning drill in the height of summer vacation: 6:45 a.m. shower; 7:30 a.m. in the van on the way to Wilmington.

"It [the program] makes me know that I have a good work ethic and can work for a very

long period of time, then take a quick break, then get back to work," said Tucker, 18, who lives in Newark. "I met new people, and it helped me improve my communication skills. It really opened me up. I loved it."

For information about the City of Wilmington Green Jobs



Steven Maile, 17, helps plant lilies. This year, 10 interns were chosen to be part of the program.

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