

# Escape the Ordinary

A Newsletter for NCCC Applicants



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**Special points of interest:**

- See what Vicksburg's River One is up to
- Where are NCCC teams currently serving?
- Important Events in October
- A Special Note from the Author



**Inside this issue:**

Where Are We Now?	2
Getting Things Done: Catching Up With River One	3
The Benefits of Service	5
Upcoming Events	5
So you've been assessed...	6
A Special Note from the Author	6

## All About NCCC

AmeriCorps NCCC is a full-time, team-based residential program for men and women ages 18-24. NCCC members are assigned to one of five campuses and organized into teams of 10-12 members. Campuses are located in Perry Point, MD, Vinton, IA, Denver, CO, Vicksburg, MS, and Sacramento, CA. NCCC teams serve approximately 4 – 6 projects throughout their ten months of service. NCCC serves every state, responding to pressing local needs that are identified by organizations in the community. Projects are focused on the following five categories – Natural and Other Disasters, Infrastructure Improvement, Environmental Stewardship and Conservation, Energy Conservation, and Urban and Rural Development. Through an inter-agency agreement with FEMA and arrangement with the



American Red Cross, NCCC members have responded to every national disaster since the program was established. Starting in 2010, NCCC has been tasked as the primary service provider of disaster relief for the entire Corporation for National and Community Service. 100 percent of members are certified in CPR, first aid, and disaster response; approximately 15% are firefighter trained by the National Park and U.S. Forest Services. NCCC teams also support local disaster relief organizations to help communities prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural or man-made disasters. Since September 2005, approximately 85 percent of NCCC members from all campuses have served more than 2.7 million hours on 1380 relief and recovery projects.



## Where Are We Now?



**Dover, DE**—Atlantic Region's Buffalo 7 is working with the Delaware National Estuarine Research Reserve. The team is assisting with Coastal Clean-up and Coast Day and making improvements to a boardwalk along the St. John's River Trail.

**New Kensington, PA**—Moose 6 from the Atlantic Region is working with the Allegheny Valley chapter of Habitat for Humanity to complete a home and assist with the start-up of a local "A Brush with Kindness" program.

**Charlottesville, VA**—Southern Region's Delta 1 is working for Charlottesville's Local Energy Alliance Program. The team is canvassing area communities, planning and implementing community events, conducting home energy reviews and recruit and training volunteers as part of the "EmPOWERing Neighborhoods" project, a community based home energy efficiency initiative.

**Lewistown, IL**—North Central's Cedar 5 is working with the Illinois Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. The team is removing invasive species along the Illinois River to protect the Emiquon Preserve and restoring the floodplain to reduce flood impact and provide cleaner water for migrating waterfowl.

**Disaster Relief Response**—More than half of the Corps are currently serving on Disaster Relief and Recovery projects. Teams are serving in New England and the Mid-Atlantic, providing support to FEMA and the Red Cross in response to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee. Other teams are continuing flood relief efforts in Minot, ND. Still other teams are supporting tornado relief efforts in Alabama and Missouri or are contributing to long-term disaster recovery efforts on the Gulf Coast and in New Orleans.

**\*\*NOTE\*\*** No projects are listed for the Pacific or Southwest Regions. Class 18 Team Leaders have already arrived for training in Sacramento and Denver, and Corps Members begin training in October.

**Want to Serve for a Day?** Serve with a current team of NCCC Members at a project in your area!  
Contact [anccc@cns.gov](mailto:anccc@cns.gov) for more information.

\*\* Please note, we may be unable to accommodate all "Serve for a Day" requests due to sponsor restrictions.\*\*

# Getting Things Done: Catching Up with River One

By Tim Staub

*For their First Round project, River 1 was deployed from the Southern Region campus in Vicksburg to Birmingham, Alabama, to assist with the city's Habitat for Humanity Chapter in rebuilding houses damaged by April's tornado outbreak. After 4 weeks on the project, River 1, along with several other teams, was redeployed to New York for disaster relief of Hurricane Irene and, later, the flooding from Tropical Storm Lee. The team spent 2 nights in New York City, worked 1 day at a distribution center in Middletown, NY, provided logistical and office support in Albany, and are now in Binghamton. I spoke with River 1 Team Leader Samantha Ahrendt and Corps Members Luke McDonald and Lindsay Shytle about their project in Birmingham and their experiences on disaster relief in New York.*



the same storm that affected Birmingham. I was definitely excited to go back. At the same time, this was our first project – as a new TL, with a new team, I was a little nervous and hoped that everything would work out.

**Luke McDonald:** I was both nervous and excited for our first project - ready to get to work, but nervous to see how the team works together.

**Lindsay Shytle:** I remember seeing the damage caused by the tornado on TV and was excited to see it for myself firsthand. When we got there, I was shocked to see that some houses had not

yet even been touched, though seeing that some of the houses had already been rebuilt was encouraging.

**And what were your thoughts upon finding out you were being pulled from the project to go to New York for disaster relief?**

**SA:** I had heard that we would be one of the teams sent for disaster relief because of the hurricane,

but I was so surprised to hear we were heading to New York City that I thought it was a joke. I was definitely excited to go and work with the Red Cross.

**LM:** Definitely surprised. I thought we might go to North Carolina, not New York. I also thought that I had no idea what we would be in for.

**LS:** I too was surprised to be heading out of our region. I was also excited (and a little nervous) to be immediately putting our CTI (Corps Training Institute) Red Cross training into action so soon. I also knew it would be a challenge dealing with all of the red tape involved with a disaster relief operation. But at the same time, I was inspired to go do great things.

**What were your thoughts about either project as your First Round concludes?**

**SA:** Without a doubt, disaster relief requires flexibility. The phrase "Hurry up and wait" is very applicable – but that's the nature of a Disaster Relief situation. Still, the thanks we've received from the communities we've worked in are so gratifying.

**LM:** As a team, we were having a great time in Birmingham with Habitat. We got to work side-by-side with the families affected by the storm. It was so meaningful, especially when we got to attend a dedication ceremony – to see how emotional it was... so meaningful.

**LS:** When we arrived for disaster relief, I became very frustrated by how chaotic it was. But now, as time has gone on, we've become such a helpful resource for the Red Cross. It's so rewarding to see the fruits of our labors. Before we leave, I hope to spend a day out in the community with those affected by the storms (I've mostly been either in the warehouse or the office providing logistical

*(Continued on page 4)*



**What were the team's thoughts as you arrived in Birmingham for your project?**

**Samantha Ahrendt:** I already had ties to this project. I recently completed service as a Corps Member here in Vicksburg, and my last week of service was spent in Tuscaloosa on disaster relief for

support).

**What's one thing you wish you knew at the beginning of either project that you know now?**

**SA:** I've learned to have the mentality that anything is possible. I personally have been so challenged by this project – each day has been filled with so many different requests or directions from red Cross personnel. I had my doubts that I could handle it all, but it's been a huge growth experience. I can say "Yes" and be able to solve any problem that's come up.

**LM:** I've learned to be open to any experience that I've come across or people



I've met. Though most of my work here on DR has been in a warehouse, I keep in mind that everything we do (no matter how small) is providing a benefit to those who are suffering because of these storms.

**LS:** No matter how much "flexibility" is stressed during CTI for disaster relief, you never really know until you experience it. I've learned to let go, to let each day happen, to not set any expectations for the day.

**What was the most surprising moment of the project?**

**SA:** My team is phenomenal! I'm so impressed with them and how much they want to work, to help, to serve.

**LM:** When we were in Albany, one of my assigned tasks was to take supplies (shovels, trash bags, etc.) to communities that needed them. I was all over

upstate New York. An enormous landslide had blocked the only road into the town of Upper Jay. When we finally got into the town, it was amazing to see how the town had pulled together, the work ethic of the community to reach out to those in need.

**LS:** Though some times can be frustrating, I love working with the people here. Everyone (the Red Cross and my team) is so giving.

**What was the most trying moment?**

**SA:** In addition to my own team, I am now responsible for five additional Corps Members for this project. Besides the stress of being deployed to a disaster relief, I had to integrate 5 new members onto my team.

**LM:** We had to deliver supplies to Plattsburgh, which is closer to Montréal than it is to Albany – it was a three hour drive one way. Upon arriving, we found out that the supervisor on Plattsburgh had also requested two days of support. To make a long story short, we made a few phone calls and ended up

staying overnight in Plattsburgh with just the clothes on our back to provide the necessary support.

**LS:** Besides the "hurry up and wait" of being in-processed by the Red Cross in New York City, my most trying moment occurred when another Corps Member and I were tasked with delivering bottles of water to a mall that was running a blood drive. There was some miscommunication within the Red Cross. Upon arriving we found out that the blood drive had occurred the day before. It turns out the water was actually for the local FEMA office that had an event the following day. I know that DR's are chaotic, and we made the best of the situation, but it was so frustrating...

**What was the most rewarding or memorable moment?**

**SA:** I just enjoy watching my team, seeing how they grow together, how they are emerging as leaders.

**LM:** My interaction with the community of Upper Jay, how the town has really pulled together, and especially how gracious and positive they were when we arrived with much-needed supplies.

**LS:** I had the privilege of attending a community dinner with one of our Red Cross supervisors in Cobleskill. The graciousness and the neighborly attitude of that community – I'll never forget it.

**And finally, what is one piece of advice you would give to prospective Corps Members?**

**SA:** After completing a service year as a Corps Member, I thought I knew what this program was about. But you always have to expect the unexpected. And though I'm sure this has been said a thousand times, BE FLEXIBLE!

**LM:** Anything can happen at any time. You just have to roll with the punches and keep in mind the "why" behind the work.

**LS:** When I was applying, I never felt like I had enough information about the application process. When I got to CTI, I also felt like I needed more information. But it would be impossible to condense all of that information into one source, especially considering this experience in disaster relief. You just trust the process, trust your instincts, and you'll do well.

*River 1 will soon embark on their Second Round project, split between Memphis and New Orleans. The team will be doing some trail work and general maintenance for ArkWings and the Wolf River Conservancy in Memphis, then head to New Orleans to help restock a library and build a playground in a Hurricane Katrina-affected community.*

**River One in Action**

River One spent a few days in Hackleburg, AL, assisting FEMA in reconstructing houses destroyed by the April 27 tornado outbreak. Check out the video [here](#).

## The Benefits of Service

- **Uniform**—includes t-shirts, sweatshirts, BDU pants, shorts, steel-toed boots
- **Housing**—campus residences are coed floors with same gender roommates; spike housing is provided by the project sponsor
- **Health Care**—complimentary coverage includes payment of most medical and surgical costs, hospitalization, prescription drugs, and emergency care
- **Child Care**—up to \$400 per month may be available for a custodial parent of a minor child
- **Personal Days**—Corps Members are entitled to 3 paid personal days off from service, as well as 2 paid “Life After AmeriCorps” days (subject to approval).
- **Transportation**—NCCC will cover the cost of a Corps Member’s travel to a campus prior to the start of a service year and back home at the end of service.
- **Living Allowance**—approximately \$4000 per year (or \$200 every two weeks) before taxes
- **Education Award**—once a Corps Member has completed 1700 hours of service, they are eligible for the Education Award. Currently, the award is \$5550.
- **Loan Forbearance**—if Corps Members have Federal Education loans (Perkins, Stafford, or Direct Loans) they may be placed in forbearance. Once a Member earns an Ed. Award, NCCC will pay the interest accrued on these loans while the Member was in service.
- **College Credit**—we currently offer, through the American Council of Education, undergraduate credit for the following three-credit-hour courses: Introduction to Service Learning and Diversity in Service (available to both Team Leaders and Corps Members); and Supervisory Skills (available only to Team Leaders).
- **Certification from American Humanics in Non-profit Employment and Management**—NCCC alumni may enroll in this online program offered by the University of Montana and LSU-Shreveport.

For more detailed information about benefits, please go [here](#).

If you have any further questions, please contact us at (800) 942-2677 or [anccc@cns.gov](mailto:anccc@cns.gov)

## Upcoming Events



Visit the Atlantic Region! The Atlantic Region Campus will host its annual Open House on Thurs, Oct 6, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Perry Point, MD. To RSVP, contact Sam McKenzie, [SMcKenzie@cns.gov](mailto:SMcKenzie@cns.gov) or 202.528.3755. Click [here](#) for more information.



Become an NCCC Member for a Day! On October 22, the NCCC Atlantic Region will host service events in Baltimore, Washington, DC, and Camden, NJ. For more information on these events, check out the promotional fliers ([here](#) and [here](#)), as well as [FAQ's](#). To register, fill out the [online registration form](#).



The next NCCC Insider: Serve On Forum will be held on October 20. The call will focus on the NCCC application process. Staff members will be available to field any questions that you, the applicant, might have about applying to NCCC.



MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE DAY

Get Involved! Make A Difference Day will be held on Saturday, October 22. For more information about this national initiative or to locate a project near you, check out the Hands On Network’s [“DAYtaBANK.”](#)

## AMERICORPS NCCC

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## So you've been assessed... Now what?

*So you've applied to NCCC, an opportunity of a lifetime. A chance to see the country, to help those in need, to meet new people. After receiving a packet in the mail, you excitedly read through all of the information, called the number, answered a few questions, then scheduled an assessment. The day of your assessment arrives, and... "An email from AmeriCorps? Status update? Assessment complete? NOW WHAT HAPPENS???"*

First of all, don't panic. In fact, congratulations are in order. Your application was reviewed, and it was decided that you possess the motivation, flexibility, and work ethic to be considered for a position in NCCC.

Though your status in your [My AmeriCorps](#) now reads "Assessment Complete," you will soon be placed onto the Waitlist. You must accept your "Waitlisted"

status through your [My AmeriCorps](#) account by following the instructions in the email. Once you do, you will receive another packet in the mail in about one week. This Waitlist Packet contains items that you need to fill out and return to us. One of the enclosed sheets will direct you to a short online survey. Completion of the survey is MANDATORY. The Medical/Mental Health Information Form is a clearance process designed to ensure that you are mentally and physically capable of participating fully; and that NCCC can ensure your safety and wellbeing. The medical form is simply a questionnaire—there is no need for a special visit to your doctor to complete the form. Finally, the Fingerprint Card (FPC) must be taken to a local police department to be completed. We recommend contacting the PD to determine if you must schedule an appointment or if a small fee is charged for the service. Please note—**INCOMPLETE FORMS WILL BE RETURNED!**

It is **EXTREMELY IMPORTANT** that you return your medical form and fingerprint card by the specified date. Failure to do so will result in automatic disqualification. If you have any extenuating circumstances that prevent you from meeting this deadline, please let us know by emailing us at [anccc@cns.gov](mailto:anccc@cns.gov).

Once the forms have been returned to us, the next step is placement. NCCC employs a "rolling admissions" process, similar to many colleges. We have a first round of placements during the application period, make a second round of placements once our application period is closed, and continue to fill slots as they become available, including up to the day before a campus opens. All selections and placements are RAN-DOM. We simply have more qualified applicants than we have slots available, and we are unable to guarantee a position to all qualified applicants.

Finally, a word of caution... Please keep your profile in your [My AmeriCorps](#) account as up to date as possible to receive all of our mailings. Several instances have been reported of recent college graduates who never received a packet, only to find out it had been delivered weeks before to their University Mailbox..

## A Special Note From the Author

This will be my last edition of "Escape the Ordinary." It has been a privilege to provide you, the NCCC applicant, with this useful tool as you prepare for life in the Corps. I hope that you have found it informative, enlightening, and entertaining.

As you prepare for your journey in NCCC, bear in mind the advice of the alumni and Corps Members currently in service. One of the most pressing themes is "flexibility." Take each day as its own in NCCC and accept where it takes you. Always keep in mind the reasons you have applied to this program, especially on days of frustration, exhaustion, or indifference.

The NCCC program has the power to change you; my year of service in 2003-04 was one of the most unbelievable and fulfilling times of my life. The places and people I served will forever remain special to me. To now be a resource and a means for others to experience similar fulfillment through the NCCC program has been equally rewarding. As my time here at NCCC headquarters draws to a close, I hope you, the applicant, bear in mind that your NCCC journey will be what you make it. The more you put into your service year, the more you will get out of it, and the rewards are priceless.



*The author, posing with two teammates on Santa Catalina Island, CA: November 2003.*

Yours in Service, Tim