

Moore-Love, Karla

From: Czornij, Marc
Sent: Wednesday, April 06, 2016 11:07 AM
To: Moore-Love, Karla
Subject: Testimony for National Service Recognition Day
Attachments: MARC CZORNIJ TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF NATIONAL SERVICE RECOGNITION DAY IN PORTLAND.pdf

Dear Ms. Moore-Love,

My name is Marc Czornij, and I'm an AmeriCorps Member serving with the city's BES Tree Program. I will speak about my service at council today. If time is short, and I am unable to present, please accept my attached written testimony.

Thank you,

Marc Czornij
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MARC CZORNIJ'S TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF NATIONAL SERVICE RECOGNITION DAY
IN PORTLAND

Good morning, Mayor Hales. Good morning, Commissioners. My name is Marc Czornij, and I am a member of the Confluence Environmental Center AmeriCorps Team. On behalf of my team, I thank you for proclaiming today National Service Recognition Day in Portland. I joined AmeriCorps because I want to dedicate my time and energy toward work I believe in and feel inspired by. Thank you for the opportunity to tell you a little about my service.

The Confluence AmeriCorps Team includes twenty members serving with a diversity of regional partners to address critical environmental needs in our most underserved communities. I serve next door with the Bureau of Environmental Services Tree Program. Since 2008, the tree program has planted more than 40,000 trees in the city--87% of which are in underserved communities. My mission with them is to aid in increasing that number, particularly in areas and communities that need it most. As you may know, Friends of Trees is a great ally and partner of the BES Tree Program, so I have been spending most of my Saturdays since January leading volunteer community planting crews in neighborhoods like Cully, Hazelwood, Powellhurst-Gilbert, and Lents. In that effort, I've had a hand in personally planting more than 70 trees and working with over 130 community members. It's been an amazing--and incredibly fun--way to work alongside neighborhood stakeholders.

Taking part in these community plantings positioned me to develop my own planting project in east Portland, collaborating with Lincoln Park Elementary's Schools Uniting Neighborhoods educators. We knew that additional trees on the school's property would benefit the students in a number of ways, particularly providing much-needed shade to a series of notoriously hot, south-facing classrooms. And so, yesterday, myself, one of my AmeriCorps teammates, and two members of the Tree Program joined thirty 2nd, 3rd, and 4th graders from the elementary's after-school garden program in planting and welcoming their new tree friends to the property. They even named some of them, including a Jefferson Elm, now known as *Awesome Tree*; and two Big Leaf Maples, dubbed *Snowcone* and *Kevin*.

I have learned, however, that planting trees doesn't always meet the direct, immediate needs of a community, so I have developed additional ways to engage communities. This has required

some thinking outside of the box and, certainly, a great aptitude for flexibility. One of the partnerships I'm most excited about is with a local organization called People-Places-Things, which teaches free adult English-language classes that focus on cultural connection and navigation over the traditional academic style of English-language classes. By working with this program, a number of very important goals are being addressed in one place. I fulfill my goal of working with a community that is historically underserved in terms of city services--the immigrant and refugee community--and they fulfill their need of practicing their English skills with real world materials, like tree species identification cards, Portland watershed maps, and guided walking tours of green infrastructure.

Recently, I've been thinking about the opportunities for change that would be lost if the Tree Program didn't have an AmeriCorps member. It would mean an absence of the projects and relationships I just mentioned--no tree planting with east Portland elementary school students yesterday afternoon, and no real world environmental education for that same community's immigrant and refugee population this evening at Midland Library. I know how incredibly important our service is as AmeriCorps members so, again, on behalf of my team, I'd like to thank you for honoring this work with your proclamation and for allowing me the opportunity to speak about how I make a difference as a Confluence AmeriCorps Member.