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AmeriCorps gets to work in Rockland

By **NANCY CACIOPPO**
THE JOURNAL NEWS
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NEW HEMPSTEAD — John and Josephine Grosso of Stony Point paused yesterday at Frederick Loescher Veterans Memorial Cemetery. They had just visited the grave site of their daughter, Elvira Buckley, who was the wife of Marine Corps veteran Donal Buckley of West Haverstraw.

Nearby, four Rockland County AmeriCorps members were setting a row of new headstones into the ground.

"I appreciate the good job they did," Josephine Grosso said.

"It's like a military uniform," her husband, John, said of the precision maintenance work.

The AmeriCorps team continued its task, maneuvering the 120-pound headstones into place with few implements and a lot of muscle.

"This is my idea of service and fresh air," said Kevin Armstrong of Nanuet, a 20-year-old junior majoring in history and communications at Boston College who is in his second summer working with AmeriCorps.

"It's a good opportunity, and I like doing physical labor," said Vanessa Stewart, 19, of Tappan, who plans to study electrical work at Oneonta College, SUNY, in the fall.

"It's a good thing, working out of doors with other people," said Leo Innocent, 18, of Spring Valley, who will apply his experience to his studies at SUNY's College of Environmental Science and Forestry in the fall.

"I was sick of working summers in retail stores," added Derek Ryan, 18, of Congers, a sophomore education major at Geneseo College, SUNY. "This physical labor keeps you in shape."

Rockland County Veterans Burial Commissioner Tony Lombardi praised the AmeriCorps members.

"They're fantastic young men and women who are doing an excellent job," he said. "They've improved the cemetery. Their work has been outstanding. They've been a great service to the veterans and their families."

William Vanderploeg, Rockland County superintendent of buildings and grounds, said the team's work was invaluable.

"We've always had a backlog of headstones to set, and they've cleaned up the backlog," he said. "They've set 135 new headstones since June. It's made a big improvement."

The young people are among 38 AmeriCorps members who have worked on various community service projects at 14 sites this year.

FYI

How to join

Rockland AmeriCorps is seeking nine members age 25 and older for year-round literacy projects and 43 members age 17 and older for environmental projects next summer throughout Rockland.

Information: • Call Rockland County AmeriCorps at 845-708-7307

- E-mail rcamericorps@co.rockland.ny.us
- Visit the Web site www.americorps.org.

AmeriCorps membership

- Year-round members perform 500 hours of service and receive 100 hours of training.
- Summer members perform 265 hours of service over nine weeks and receive 50 hours of training.
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rockland County and the East Ramapo school district provide all training.
- Year-round members receive a \$4,076 living stipend and a \$1,800 educational award.
- Summer members receive a \$1,800 living stipend and a \$1,000 educational award.
- Members can earn internship credits for school and develop future employment and college career skills.

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Other projects included staffing litter patrols for the Orangetown and Clarkstown Highway Departments, locating stream blockages for Clarkstown and the Rockland County Drainage Agency, maintaining trails at Clarkstown parks and county parks, working on the West Nile virus initiative for the Rockland County Department of Health, farming at the Rudolph Steiner Fellowship Community, serving as environmental educators and art instructors for the Hudson Valley Council Boy Scouts of America and the Rockland County Girl Scouts, and gathering data about the Hudson River Valley Greenway program for the Rockland County Department of Planning.

They also beautified Sloatsburg, Hillburn and the Robert L. Yeager Health Center for the Rockland County Department of Facilities Management, and developed activities for children at the Strawtown Art and Garden Studio.

Kathy Galione, project coordinator, said the Rockland AmeriCorps program, run under the auspices of the county Youth Bureau, just received its next \$148,800 federal grant.

For their service, she said, AmeriCorps workers receive a stipend or biweekly paycheck and money that can be used for college, graduate school or to pay off outstanding student loans. Community partners — including county agencies, towns, villages and nonprofit organizations — who host the projects agree to match the AmeriCorps' member's stipend. Galione said AmeriCorps was an ideal program for people recently retired or between school and work, or anyone who wants a part-time job, and was a great way to receive on-the-job training and to network.

In addition to environmental projects, she said, AmeriCorps is involved with community literacy projects in partnership with the East Ramapo school district's Parent-Child Home Program.

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