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**AmeriCorps volunteers to spend month improving campus at Arkansas 4-H Center**

By Rebekah Hall
U of A System Division of Agriculture

**Fast Facts:**

* AmeriCorps team of 12 members spending 4 weeks at Arkansas 4-H Center
* Volunteers will work on projects focused on “reducing, reusing, and recycling” around the campus
* Team is eighth AmeriCorps team to serve 4-H Center

(614 words)
(Newsrooms: SUBS 10th graf to CORRECT date of snow from Feb. 2020 to Feb. 2021)

With art at <https://flic.kr/s/aHsmXbUneJ>)
(‘Kabat’ in 4th graph is CQ)

LITTLE ROCK — A dozen AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps members are spending four weeks completing repairing, recycling, and beautifying projects at the C.A. Vines Arkansas 4-H Center.

The team arrived on Saturday, Nov. 20, after three weeks of AmeriCorps training. After spending a few days to get the lay of the land, they got to work on several projects with a “reduce, reuse, and recycle theme,” Shannon Caldwell, program director at the 4-H Center, said. The group will stay at the center until Dec. 18.

The 12 AmeriCorps members range in age from 18 to 23, including recent high school graduates, college students and recent college graduates. They are from Minnesota, Virginia, Oregon, Washington, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and California, and share a common interest in service work — and the many ways it can manifest in a community.

Landon Leonard, 18, said he’s interested in projects related to disaster relief and a career in emergency management. Michaela Kabat, 18, said she looks forward to working with nonprofits and “getting experience dealing with hands-on projects.”

Team member Sarah Strauss, 18, said she grew up watching the impact of the 4-H program and other extension programs in her community through her mother’s work with University of Minnesota Extension.

“Since I just graduated high school, I was really looking for a gap year option that allowed me to pursue my interests in service learning, and to travel around with a group of people around my same age doing meaningful work in our communities,” Strauss said.

Team member George Webb-Watkins, 23, is serving his second AmeriCorps term. Originally from Stafford County, Virginia, he said his desire to engage with service work stems from his interest as a child in the original Civilian Conservation Corps.

“I always thought that sounded interesting, and I wondered what it would have been like to be a part of that,” Webb-Watkins said. “Then when I heard about this particular program, I was like, ‘Sign me up!’”

The 12-member team is the largest AmeriCorps group to work at the center to date. With only four weeks on-site, the volunteers will pack several tasks into their time.

The team will be working with Steve Wilson, physical plant manager at the 4-H Center, replacing insulation and ceiling tiles in one of the center’s conference rooms, which was damaged during the heavy snow Arkansas experienced in February 2021. The group will also assist in the development of a demonstration garden, in partnership with Pulaski County Master Gardeners, as well as complete a 43-acre controlled burn in partnership with the Arkansas Forestry Commission. The burn is designed to reduce the risk of wildfire and encourage the revival of native flora.

“You can see evidence of the benefit of hosting an AmeriCorps team all across the 4-H Center campus — from energy conservation, recycling, trail building and improvement, to building and maintaining structures,” Caldwell said. “This year’s team will continue that work.”

The volunteers will also work on striping the Cabe Hall parking lot, repurposing existing stone to create new flower beds and a new retaining wall at the lakeside, repairing and preventing erosion around the campus, categorizing scrap and recyclable materials at the warehouse and completing the final phase of the campus’ conversion to LED lighting.

“AmeriCorps NCCC team efforts allow us to provide more opportunities for youth and adults to participate in programs at the 4-H Center, and therefore be introduced to 4-H and Extension,” Caldwell said. “The AmeriCorps team members [also] come away with an appreciation for Extension, 4-H, and Arkansas as a whole. Hosting a team is mutually beneficial, and we are so grateful for this opportunity to host these young adults from across the country.”

To learn more about the Arkansas 4-H Center, visit [thevinescenter.org](https://thevinescenter.org/). To learn more about AmeriCorps, visit <https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/americorps/americorps-programs>.

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