

Local AmeriCorps VISTAs celebrate National Service Day

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On Tuesday, “Mayor and County Recognition Day for National Service,” county officials and mayors across the country will thank AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers and recognize their impact, and several local volunteers will participate.

The nation’s cities and counties are increasingly turning to national service as a cost-effective strategy to address local challenges. By unleashing the power of citizen volunteers, AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs have a positive and lasting impact, making communities better places to live. Locally, Sarah Hendley, Andy Willis and Jay Shih are AmeriCorps VISTAs working in Telluride. The three plan to honor National Service Day by volunteering with Angel Baskets.

Hendley, Willis and Shih said they believe a coordinated recognition day presents a unique opportunity to spotlight the key role that national service plays in helping counties solve problems. Participating in the day will highlight the impact of citizen service, show support for nonprofit and national service groups and inspire more residents to serve in their communities. The VISTAs are going above and beyond with a plan to clean up the Telluride Food Bank, which is run by Angel Baskets.

“Our Telluride Food Bank had a leak in the roof, which resulted in repair construction, and lots of dust. It needs a thorough cleaning, i.e., take cans off shelves, wet wipe shelves, cans, clean refrigerators, windows, everything,” said Camille Price, a member of the Angel Baskets board of directors.

The Telluride Foundation and Tri-County Health Network said they have been fortunate to have AmeriCorps VISTAs over the last four years, and called them indispensable in developing and expanding programming efforts. These volunteers have proven to be a vital resource for these organizations, helping to manage and coordinate the day to day operations of their programs while bringing youthful energy and enthusiasm to the office.

“We felt it was about time to sing the praises of these team members, who have sacrificed a year of their lives to live at poverty level and spend long working hours at the Telluride Foundation,” said April Montgomery, programs director at the foundation.

In 1965, President John F. Kennedy penned an idea for a service program that would fight poverty in America. Today that program is AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America). Volunteers are paid a living allowance equal to the poverty line of the area in which they are serving. They work to build capacity for nonprofits ministering to the poorest, most at-risk populations around the country.

As one might imagine, it’s no easy task living at poverty level in Telluride, but that’s what makes our VISTAs truly extraordinary. Despite the hardships and the sacrifices, they’ve accomplished amazing things. Over the course of three years Telluride VISTAs have:

- Completed a Community Health Needs Assessment across 2.5 counties that garnered more than 1,000

completed surveys

- Created a new program that serves the rural aging population
- Successfully secured \$1.1 million in grant funding for Tri County Health Network for the next 3 years
- Provided training and technical assistance to community boards in Rico, Dove Creek, Naturita and Norwood, all of which are now raising money for their local community endowments
- Provided assistance and managed a grant program for the Paradox Business Technical Assistance Program, assisting approximately 13 startup businesses and entrepreneurs.