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Volunteers help clean areas neglected after flooding

BY ROBERT L. BAKER (STAFF WRITER)

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STAFF PHOTO / ROBERT BAKER Erin Pierce of the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership joins National Civilian Community Corps volunteers in Falls for a stream cleanup Saturday.

FALLS TWP. - Since March 11, Cassandra Lewis of Niagara Falls, N.Y., has been working along the North Branch of the Susquehanna River helping with stream cleanup, mostly from debris left behind by last September's flood.

She has taken a year off from her undergraduate studies in social work to get some hands-on experience caring for society.

Ms. Lewis is part of a National Civilian Community Corps, a subsidiary of Americorps, which has been in the Falls area of Wyoming County since Wednesday and will be leaving next Wednesday for Ohio.

On Saturday, nine other corps members and six students from EI HAB (the former St. Michael's School) were on a mission to clean up debris that had backed up six months ago from the Susquehanna along Whitelock Creek.

"People who lost homes were so busy getting their lives back to normal that litter control really took a back seat," Erin Pierce of the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership said Saturday.

The Susquehanna Greenway Partnership had the group previously in Bloomsburg, Berwick and Shickshinny, and liked what they encountered in Falls.

"If we made a small dent, that would be a huge success," Ms. Pierce said because people feel overwhelmed by it all.

Corps team leader Patrick Skovira of Westminster, Md., saw the flooding firsthand, because he was on an NCCC team last year, but this year as a team leader, he is seeing other effects, like the landscape changed with streams

taking on new courses, and parks that have been kind of left behind.

On Thursday, the team was bleaching playground equipment at the Hoch Memorial Park in West Falls because community members were planning an Easter egg hunt there Saturday.

This Tuesday as the NCCC local effort approaches its end, Mr. Skovira said the young adults ages 18-24 would be having a picnic with students from EI HAB to share what it's like to give up a year of your life for a bigger calling.

"It's well worth it," Mr. Skovira, who graduated from Shepherd University in 2010, said.

"The hands-on experience, getting out in different communities, talking to different people and seeing what you're capable of is hard to match in the classroom," he said.

Contact the writer: bbaker@wcexaminer.com

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