

A Flock of Johnnies Lands in the Arboretum this Summer

Jenny Kutter

Franklin D. Roosevelt had a vision. In 1932 he saw two seemingly unrelated problems—increasing soil erosion and declining timber resources in the vast open spaces of the nation, and thousands of young, energetic men in need of work. What followed was the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of young men to participate in an unprecedented wave of conservation, forestry, and agricultural projects across the nation. This mobilization, referred to as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), had a profound impact on the land and the people, an impact that continues to be felt more than 75 years later.

In 2009, SJU Interim President Dan Whalen had a vision. He saw an opportunity to create meaningful employment opportunities for Saint John's students at a time when the availability of summer employment could greatly impact the lives of the students at Saint John's. While the current economic conditions can hardly be compared to those of the 1930s, Whalen was inspired by the stories and impact of the CCC to create an SJU Summer Initiative to employ more Saint John's students to work on campus and in the Arboretum than has ever been done before. Collectively, eighty positions were created in more than thirty departments at Saint John's, including the students working in the Arboretum this summer.

"This is a natural for Saint John's. It matches the interest in preserving the natural environment with the care and compassion the monks have historically had for the environment and people," Whalen said. The ultimate goal of the initiative is to continue to help young men get a good, solid liberal arts education. With the help of donors and reserve funding put toward the SJU Summer Initiative,

the Arboretum has hired nineteen students to work the land this summer. Divided into four crews, these students will be educators, bridge builders, buckthorn eradicators, prairie burners, trail laborers, and more.

The funding from this initiative also covers the tools and materials needed for summer land projects, as well as additional supervisors to help manage the crews. The Arboretum is extremely grateful for this unexpected pool of resources to complete several projects on the land. What we are most grateful for, however, is the opportunity to create a lifelong interest in land stewardship for nineteen students this summer. As Whalen put it, "People who work the land, in some ways it becomes a part of them."

The SJU Summer Initiative helps students earn the money needed to put toward their education, and also gives them a deeper connection with the land. Whalen noted, "My hope is this will be one of the best summers of their lives. They'll work hard, go to bed tired, walk trails they've never walked before, swim in Lake Sag, and develop great camaraderie among the crews." That is our hope too.

2009 Summer Student Staff

Brush and Burn Crew

Patrick Cook
Brandon Dale
Tyler Etheridge
William Fladland
Leo Flynn
Troy Schlicht
Alex Warzecha

Bridge and Trail Crew

William Faller
Kyle French
Bryan Jaspersen
Michael Keegan
Michael Shmalen
Chris Vierzba

Land Laborer Crew

Adam Justin
Aaron Laine
Andrew Norman
Dustin Schlangen

Environmental Education Crew

Bobby Mandell
Karl Nohner
Megan Van Loh

Jenny Kutter is the Arboretum department coordinator. Flocks of Johnnies notwithstanding, she prefers the chickadee for not having migrated all winter.



Karl Nohner

Removing invasive species from the prairie is just one of many summer tasks for the crews of students working in the Arboretum this summer.