



May 27, 2011

Celebrating 25 Years!!



Maria Madrigal, SEA Lab Program Manager

1. When were you in the Corps and for how long?

I graduated from Loyola Marymount University as an Art Major with a Minor in Natural Sciences. When I graduated I didn't have a lot of job skills but had a lot of loans. So, I started looking for AmeriCorps programs so that I could pay off my loans and luckily I found the SEA Lab. I started in August of 1999 and served as an AmeriCorps member for two years. In the fall of 2001 I became a staff member and have been here ever since.

2. Please tell us about your life now, both professionally and personally.

I became the Volunteer Coordinator for the SEA Lab in the fall of 2001 and then transitioned to the Education Coordinator position the following fall. I'm currently the Program Manager of the SEA Lab. I oversee all of the education programs that the SEA Lab offers. My responsibilities range from training corpsmembers to creating the curriculum and trying to establish new education contracts. Managing our education programs takes a big chunk of my time. I also handle the overall schedule of the program ensuring the necessary resources are available and don't conflict with other projects. I also handle most of the disciplinary issues that arise with the corpsmembers.

I went back to school to earn my Masters degree in Ecological Teaching and Learning from Lesley University, which is based in Cambridge. The program allowed me to continue working while earning my degree, I spent my first summer in Maine and the second in Boston. I officially got my degree in May of 2005.

In my free-time I mostly spend it with my family and friends. I have a new little niece that is adorable and I try to spend as much time with her as I can. A lot of people are surprised that I was an art major but don't actually draw anymore. I think I've shifted my artistic talents and have become an amateur photographer. I've actually photographed a couple weddings for friends. Recently, I've also become very active with my high school's alumni board.

3. How did the Corps influence who you are and what you are doing currently?

I joined the Corps because my sister had been involved with an AmeriCorps program in northern California and I thought it was a great program. I really bought into the idea of helping communities improve while also paying off my educational debt. It provided me with the opportunity to gain the skills that you can't always learn in a classroom or to explore a career that always seemed out of reach. Bruce loves to tell people that when I first started I didn't even know how to swim and now I take advantage of any opportunity to get my corpsmembers and kids out in the water to really experience the marine environment.

I had some background in the sciences but my biology classes had never been as in-depth as my training at the SEA Lab. Giancarlo Cetrulo was the SEA Lab's Education Coordinator and my direct supervisor. His efforts to immerse us in the marine environment really influenced my learning and my teaching style. Giancarlo was and continues to be a great mentor.

The Corps gave me the job skills I felt I was lacking and inspired me to ensure that I could provide the same opportunities to other young adults. Whatever opportunities I had I want to make sure I can facilitate those opportunities for others. I really like working with corpsmembers who simply lack the self-confidence and need someone to encourage them. It feels great when they accomplish something and all they needed was that little push from you.

4. What do you most remember about your time with the Corps?

My favorite project that I worked on as a corpsmember was when I worked with a Clean & Green team. I had the opportunity to work with Simple Green's EGBAR Foundation and with Felipe Campos to develop the field studies throughout their session. We culminated the session by visiting Catalina Island during Earth Day weekend. The students traveled to Catalina onboard the Body Glove boat and snorkeled for their first time. I learned a lot from Felipe and admire his ability to make any moment a teachable moment.

Young Adult Corps

This week the water efficiency crew finished up the last installation at the El Cariso Demonstration Smart Garden. Crew Supervisor, Gerald Fletcher, worked with Frank Vuoso and a dedicated water efficiency crew to perform maintenance on the site and install a rain barrel along with a sign explaining the benefits of rainwater catchment. On Wednesday the site passed inspection!



Corpsmembers Louis Blunt and Keshonda Jamerson showing off the demonstration rain barrel

Crew Supervisor Norah Bustamante led a group of water efficiency corpsmembers in a weed abatement project to clean up the South Bay Retirement Residence Center Garden next to Compton Creek Park. The Crew collected 175 bags of weeds and made the garden area more accessible to the residents of the retirement community.



Before and After

This past week, our Wildlands Recovery Team (WRT) Crew provided volunteer work as they attended Mulholland Clean Up Day, similar to the LA River Clean Up Day, where they removed several truck loads of trash, debris, old tires and abandoned construction material.



Jorge Perez and Daniel Ruiz removing old tires at the Mulholland Clean Up Day

This week, MRCA Squad Boss, Jeff Schmachtenberger supervised WRT members Stephen Nolls, Ryan Walker, Jonnathan Perez, Taylor Moore, Steven Moak, and Jon Griffin on a “prescribed burn”. A prescribed burn is a tool that firefighters use to reduce the “fuel” for the fire - to burn trees or brush that would otherwise fuel a large wildfire. Controlled burns actually mimic what happens in nature. Many birds, animals and plants rely on occasional fires to change the environment in a way that is beneficial to them.



WRT members learning how to do a prescribed burn

On March 5, 1988, a chemical plant owned by Grow Group Inc., in the City of Commerce, emitted a chemical cloud that forced the evacuation of up to 28,000 Eastside residents. AQMD accused the Grow Group Inc. plant of creating a public nuisance in two ways--by releasing hazardous chemicals into the air and for failure to have its air pollution control permits posted in the workplace. Grow Group Inc. agreed to pay a \$400,000 fine and contribute \$350,000 to scholarships at five Los Angeles-area high schools; Students from Schurr, Pioneer, Montebello, El Rancho and Bell Gardens High Schools receive awards. Each year these scholarship recipients work along side our corpsmembers to plant trees around the campus of the host school.

This year, corpsmembers from our East LA site traveled to Pioneer High School to participate in the County District Attorney Environmental Scholarship Awards Tree Planting. Our corpsmembers and scholarship award winners from these schools planted 11 new trees at Pioneer HS. Students were all dressed up but still grabbed a shovel and helped plant trees. This is a planting that the Corps has participated in for the past 5 years in celebration of scholarship award winners. Chief Deputy District Attorney, Jacquelyn Lacey, presented scholarship awards to 9 different students, and thanked our corpsmembers for their efforts and encouraged them to continue their education. We look forward to next year's event at Bell Gardens HS.



Chief Deputy DA Jacquelyn Lacey with scholars and corpsmembers Sallahudean Payne, Jarrell Murray, and Jeffery Scott before the planting



Supervisor Michael Luong performs a tree planting demonstration

RACLA

RACLA crews will be recycling the entire weekend at the Dodger Stadium all the way through next week.