

July 29, 2011

Celebrating 25 Years!



Vincent Montoya, University of British Columbia, PhD Pathology

When were you in the Corps and for how long? What Corps Programs did you participate in?

I was in the Corps from 2001 to 2003 at SEA Lab. My responsibilities were to lead classes and the general public through the aquarium and to introduce students to scientific concepts via classroom activities. We also participated in public outreaches both by traveling directly to inland schools that could not make the trip out to Redondo Beach and on occasion assisting the Corps in clean ups around Los Angeles. Finally, through the direction provided at the SEA Lab, I hosted a beach clean-up, a habitat restoration, composting classes, as well as a nature walk. All of the above responsibilities assisted my public speaking skills and most importantly, and it was a conducive environment to nurture a growing passion in biology. Many of the people I worked with were amazing and continue to inspire me to this day.

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

Given my passion for marine biology, an opportunity arose to attend the University of Hawaii at Hilo, and I took it with little hesitation. Thanks to AmeriCorps and the Corps, I was able to pay for a few years of university all on my own. While marine biology is nothing short of amazing, I eventually switched my major and transferred to the University of Hawaii at Manoa to pursue a degree in Microbiology.

Presently I am living in Vancouver, Canada. Vancouver is a great place to live. The mountains are amazing and everyone utilizes the outdoors. If there is a horizontal path, people are walking/running/biking on it, and if there is a vertical one, people are climbing it somehow.

Because of the hard work I put into my degree and on my own personal time, I was able to find employment somewhat quickly in Canada and started at the British Columbia Center for Disease Control (one of the best places in Canada to work as a microbiologist). Currently, I am about halfway through my PhD in Pathology at the University of British Columbia. I am identifying new bacteria that exist in the human body so as to better understand their relationship with us and how the "friendly" bacteria change when we are infected by other pathogenic bacteria. I am also looking for bacteria or viruses that might be associated with various cancers as well. We have several leads and if our findings are solidified in the future, they could be used to better treat the millions of people that have any of the cancers we are researching. We are only beginning to understand the complex relationship that our bodies have with microorganisms, and needless to say, it is an exciting time in biology. My hope is that in the future we will understand life as less of a "us against them" and more of a "us and how do we work together".

Please explain briefly about why you joined the Corps?

I joined the Corps initially because I wanted to get involved with an environmental science program after being fed up so many times seeing garbage on an otherwise beautiful street/beach. I therefore wanted to be part of the solution in some way. I also wanted a meaningful job as there is not much meaning in scooping ice cream or shelving books (depending on the book) which was what I was doing prior to working at the SEA Lab. Since I had no relevant experience, I thought that I would have to work my way up, so I literally walked through the door and asked them if they needed any help taking out

their garbage. Luckily, they had a volunteer program to help people like me find a way inside this field. In a short couple of months, a position as an intern became available and I was hired.

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

The Corps was very influential in helping me realize that sometimes accomplishing the impossible is done when you simply take the initiative. Volunteering throughout my college degree was always very easy once I took the initiative and these experiences helped me receive paid jobs in the field I was interested in quite easily and eventually my acceptance into graduate school.

I am most thankful for the encouragement all of my co-workers and superiors provided me with to follow my passion in biology. I was surrounded by people who were not trying to use me for their benefit, or people who were there solely because they wanted a paycheck. These people were present simply because they wanted to be and I think each of them had the kind of attitude that they were going to make the best of any situation, which is probably why it was so great to begin with. In an environment such as that, I think I would have been inspired regardless of which profession I chose to follow. I was also humbled in the presence of those individuals involved in the Corps who were balancing so many duties and external pressures in their lives. I like to think that these individuals helped me focus on what is important.

Starbucks

On Saturday, July 23rd, Brent Scheiwe, Director of SEA Lab, led a coastal restoration project with 15 energetic Starbucks volunteers at Dockweiler State Beach. The volunteers helped remove invasive plants, picked up trash and watered the native plants near the Youth Center. Many thanks to Starbucks for making a positive impact in the community! To see more photos, [click here](#).



Starbucks employee's cleaning up Dockweiler Beach

Green Jobs and Career Pathways

This week, The Corps Network released its new publication on Green Jobs and Career Pathways for low-income youth. Download it free of charge by clicking [here](#). Check out page 16 to read about the LA Corps' success story, Yesenia Ramirez!

Young Adult Corps

This week the Water Efficiency Crew went through a Waterwise Irrigation Course with Instructor Juan Garcia. They learned about irrigation sizing, scheduling and proper planting along with how to perform an irrigation audit. This training will prepare corpsmembers to enter irrigation auditing and landscaping careers.



Instructor Juan Garcia teaching irrigation scheduling; Corpsmembers learning to perform an audit with a catch can test

Headquarters High School is planning a camping trip to Morro Bay on August 25 to August 27. The fee is \$30 and it includes: transportation, food, camping gear, activities, etc. To purchase tickets, please contact Charles Ramos at (213) 749-3601 ext 203.



Thanks to the Rob Drydek Foundation for their donation of 70 skateboards to the Corps! Skateboards were distributed to YAC corpsmembers and EcoAcademy students.



Recycling Across Los Angeles

This weekend RACLA crews will be recycling at Dodger Stadium; they will also be at STAPLES Center recycling during the X-games.