NRCS VolunteerVoice

"The Voice of the Earth Team"

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

First Quarter 2009

Volunteers Assist LANDCARE With Efficiency

Submitted by: Venessa Homewood, Office Assistant, NHQ

Earth Team volunteers Tim Jackson and Joe McDonald assisted the National LANDCARE Office with a week long Lean Six Sigma Kaizen Event. Tim and Joe are full time Wells Fargo employees who work in Strategic Planning. They each offered to take their vacation time to help out NRCS. Tim and Joe each have over eight years of experience with Lean Six Sigma and they both hold a Black Belt, which is one of the highest ranks in this program.

Six Sigma identifies and removes unnecessary steps in manufacturing and business processes in order to ensure efficiency and eliminate errors or waste. During the Kaizen event, the LANDCARE Team demonstrated how they each did their job and they were timed with stop watches. A process map made of "post it notes" was created to demonstrate the current process and a much leaner process in the future.

(left-right) Jennifer Dubendorf, Iowa NRCS GIS Specialist with Joe McDonald, Earth Team volunteer and Black Belt Kaizen instructor

(left-right) Tim Jackson, Earth Team volunteer and Black Belt Kaizen Instructor and Doug Wilson, National NRCS Print Specialist

During the official "Report Out" the Kaizen participants explained the 21.5% elimination of waste that was identified and how this results in a 45.6% time saving. Suggestions ranged from having a supply of envelopes ready and pre-labeled with return addresses on the shelf, to re-arranging the entire shipping workstation allowing a smoother more efficient work flow. Other suggestions were technology related and will assist the staff when they begin investigating their long term goal of creating/purchasing a new database and website.

Another event at LANDCARE is planned for January 2009. This will be a Capacity Kaizen and will help determine the best way for warehouse and office space to be utilized.

Tim and Joe were officially signed up as Earth Team volunteers and they have agreed to use some more of their vacation in January to assist with the Capacity Kaizen. Thanks Joe and Tim – NRCS appreciates what you did!

Jerry Smith volunteered at the National Earth Team/ LANDCARE Office in Des Moines, IA. He assisted with rolling posters and placing them into mailing tubes, colating packets and making copies. "I really enjoyed volunteering for the NRCS and doing what I can to help with conservation," said Jerry.

Gene Kingdon Retires From Volunteer Service After 20 Years

Submitted by: Lori DePauw, State Volunteer Coordinator, South Dakota

One of South Dakota NRCS's first Earth Team (ET) volunteers, Gene Kingdon has finally decided to "retire" at the age of 96 with 20 years of service. Since July 1987, Gene has logged 3,840 hours -- a value in volunteer time of approximately $72,000.

Gene was a guiding light to many other volunteers who, through his encouragement, also became interested in the program. He was instrumental in "jump-starting" many tasks by recruiting other senior citizens to join him. Always quick with a smile and a joke, co-workers would find Gene stuffing envelopes, clipping and filing news releases (until the process went electronic), and supplying the outgoing mail room with labels and envelopes. He spent many hours in the State office doing tasks which freed-up office personnel to spend more time completing other jobs.

His volunteer work didn't stop with NRCS. Gene kept himself busy making deliveries for Meals-on-Wheels. He has logged 2,959 hours and countless miles, to bring hot meals to other senior citizens.

It was an honor to have Gene as an ET volunteer. He is truly missed around the office. Even though his volunteering days are over, he still pops in every once in a while to ask, "how are you surviving without me?"

(left) Gene Kingdon receives an award from Janet Oertly, State Conservationist, South Dakota

Tennessee Volunteer Recognized for Contributions

Submitted by: Dimple Geesling, State Volunteer Coordinator, Tennessee

Maria Gonzales was recently recognized as "Outstanding Council Volunteer" by the Appalachian RC&D Council at their annual awards luncheon in Fall Creek Falls, Tennessee. "Maria is willing to pitch in and help no matter what the task -- big or small, simple or very complicated and is a tremendous asset to our Council," said NRCS Appalachian RC&D Project Coordinator Roy Settle.

Ms. Gonzales, a retired engineer from the Philippines, has provided expertise in complex database design, creation, and management to enhance projects at a high level of customer service. She is in the council office at least once per week helping the council with their bookkeeping in addition to working on projects from her home and at offsite events. Maria was recruited through the VolunteerMatch.org website.

(left-right) Council Member Florette Buckles presents an "Outstanding Council Volunteer" plaque to Maria Gonzales

(left-right) Outreach Director for Link Associates Cindy Spann, Earth Team Volunteer and Link consumer T.J. Burt, and State office coordinator Jill Clothier kick-off the Iowa NRCS Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) for 2008 in Des Moines. Link is an authorized CFC charity in central Iowa that provides services for persons with mental retardation and their families. Burt volunteers at the Iowa NRCS State office in Des Moines where he works with his sister, Jill Clothier distributing soils information to districts and other customers.

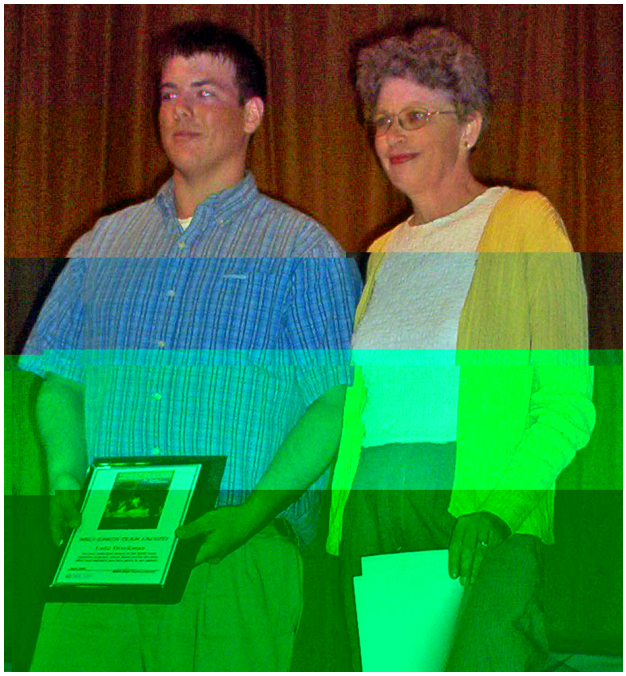
Scholarships Awarded to Earth Team Volunteer

Submitted by: Dick Tremain, Public Affairs Specialist, Iowa

June 2008 high school graduate Luke Dreckman was recently awarded two scholarships and a certificate of appreciation for serving his community as an Earth Team volunteer and as a youth mentor for the local Pheasants Forever Chapter. "He gained valuable work experience as an Earth Team volunteer," district conservationist Renee Braun told students, parents, and faculty at the Marcus-Meriden-Cleghorn (MMC) Community High School awards banquet. "Now, Luke Dreckman is able to use this experience on both scholarship and job applications. As a result of his Earth Team volunteer work and Community Service; this young man is being awarded scholarships totaling $1,500 from the Cherokee Soil and Water Conservation District and the Cherokee County Pheasants Forever Chapter."

Luke has logged 107 hours as an Earth Team volunteer in the Cherokee County NRCS office where he worked in the field helping staff layout conservation practices and assisting with promotion of wildlife habitat practices.

Dreckman is currently a student at Iowa Lakes Community College in Emmetsburg and hopes to land a career with either NRCS or the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.



(left-right) Luke Dreckman holds a certificate presented by Renee Braun