



PennSERVE Executive Director Maureen Eccleston speaks at the AmeriCorps "Day of A" opening ceremony Tuesday at the Community Arts Center.

KAREN VIBERT-KENNEDY/Sun-Gazette

Stepping up

AmeriCorps lends 'A' hand

By CARA MORNINGSTAR

cmorningstar@sungazette.com

About 600 AmeriCorps members from across the state came to Williamsport Tuesday for the "Day of A," the organization's day to celebrate what it stands for by working on service projects together.

One city hosts the event each year, and this is the first time PennSERVE, the state-level agency that oversees the AmeriCorps program statewide, has chosen Williamsport.

"This is the largest AmeriCorps week event in the entire country this year ... so, across the country, 75,000 AmeriCorps members are celebrating their service this week. We're the largest in one place at one time," said Maureen Eccleston, executive director of PennSERVE. "At PennSERVE, we have the opportunity to fund and support AmeriCorps programs across the state of Pennsylvania. We support 19 different



CARA MORNINGSTAR/Sun-Gazette

Heidi Krigar, left, and Alexis Mckenna, right, both AmeriCorps members, help serve up food at the American Rescue Workers, 643 Elmira St., on Tuesday during the "Day of A" event in which 600 AmeriCorps members from across the state came to Williamsport to offer help with service projects throughout the area.

programs, and we're really excited to have you guys here today."

They started their day at the Community Arts Center to discuss AmeriCorps and the importance of community service.

"One thing I learned

from AmeriCorps so far is how to step out of my comfort zone and be a people person," said Shamea Chestnut, STEP AmeriCorps member.

Odren Polk, STEP AmeriCorps member, serves in the Jersey Shore area.

"One thing I've learned ... is being a positive role model," he said. "I went from giving cold and lonely stares to warm hugs and friendly smiles. I believe that

(See AMERICORPS, Page A-5)



CARA MORNINGSTAR/Sun-Gazette

Sean Magro, a member of Playworks associated with AmeriCorps from Philadelphia, helps dust mop the gym inside the YWCA, 815 W. Fourth St., on Tuesday during the "Day of A" event.

AmeriCorps lends 'A' hand

(From Page A-1)

helping people not only changes your life but helps others."

Tyran Fisher, STEP AmeriCorps member, said he has learned time and patience by serving with AmeriCorps.

Emily Gale, STEP AmeriCorps program manager, said AmeriCorps members help make a difference where they serve.

"AmeriCorps means you get to help people, you get to help yourself, you get to actively listen and learn about the community, about unity, about learning and learning with a team," she said.

Steve Keener, president and CEO of Little League International and special guest speaker, said Little League is meant to provide children a great example in their formative years.

"That baseball field really becomes a classroom of sorts. Our ultimate goal is for participation in Little League Baseball to help instill in young people values and understanding the importance of teamwork, fair play and sportsmanship," he said. "Qualities that ... will lead them to serve their time like AmeriCorps members, to be



CARA MORNINGSTAR/Sun-Gazette

Michaela Vincent, a member of Playworks associated with AmeriCorps from Philadelphia, helps dust the gym inside the YWCA, 815 W. Fourth St., on Tuesday.

good, responsible citizens."

Jerry Oleksiak, of the state Department of Labor and Industry and PennSERVE advisory board presiding officer, said serving the community is vital.

"You serve children and youth, veterans, military families and individuals who need support to live independently," he said. "AmeriCorps members increase the capacity of nonprofit organizations. They clean and protect the environment ... as

we've heard here in Clinton and Lycoming counties, STEP AmeriCorps members support schools and local nonprofit organizations."

He said that the experience is also helpful to the AmeriCorps members.

"AmeriCorps launches careers. Research has found 24 percent of resumes with AmeriCorps in their background receive a call back for an interview," he said. "That's much higher than the average of 17 per-

cent."

After the speaker presentations, groups of AmeriCorps members gathered to go out into the community to work on service projects throughout the local area, including various STEP offices, the city recreation department, YWCA Northcentral PA, Central PA Food Bank, Transitional Living Centers, Family Promise, Pennsylvania College of Technology, the American Rescue Workers and other places.