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Austin Conservation Corps launched

AUSTIN, Texas—The Austin Conservation Corps—a program that gives college-age people the opportunity to improve city parks while earning money and receiving an education—was launched Wednesday, Nov. 11, by the Austin Community College Center for Public Policy and Political Studies, the Austin Parks and Recreation Department, Austin Energy and Goodwill Industries of Central Texas.

All nine members of the Austin Conservation Corps are enrolled at Austin Community College for next semester; some of their coursework will be tied to conservation. Members of the Austin Conservation Corps sign up for a 12-week commitment. This means the inaugural crew will work through the end of this year and then be replaced by a new crew.

“The Austin Conservation Corps gives the city a very inexpensive way to clean and repair the trails along Lady Bird Lake and to improve other parks. It also gives young people a positive way to earn money and a great way to advance their education,” said former Texas Gov. Mark White, a member of the board of ACC’s Center for Public Policy and Political Studies.

In 1985, White signed an executive order establishing the Texas Conservation Corps.

Gerald Hill, vice president of the board of ACC’s Center for Public Policy and Political Studies, said: “The young people of the Austin Conservation Corps are being empowered through the development of work skills, education and employment training opportunities. They also are learning how to make a difference and become contributing citizens in our city and state.”

ACC’s Center for Public Policy and Political Studies oversees the Austin Conservation Corps, which has a budget of about \$250,000. Corps members are paid through Goodwill, and Austin Energy provides money for a supervisor of the Corps work crew. The Austin Parks and Recreation Department supplies tools and equipment.

Organizers say continuation of the Austin Conservation Corps depends on additional community funding. Next spring, organizers hope to have 25 participants.

Xavier Netherland, a 19-year-old Conservation Corps member from Austin, said the program represents “a new beginning” and “opens a lot of doors.” He said participating in the Conservation Corps gets “you back on your toes—moving forward in your life and being more independent.”

Netherland, who aspires to play defensive tackle for the University of Texas football team, said he enjoys the exercise and the work experience he’s gaining through the Conservation Corps.

“I like learning something new every day,” Netherland said.

About the Center for Public Policy and Political Studies

The Austin Community College Center for Public Policy and Political Studies (the Center) was created in early 2007 to provide ACC students and faculty with the opportunity engage in the public policy process through a variety of educational and resources. This program is the first of its kind, a nonpartisan and externally funded 501(c) 3 organization established at a community college. The Center is dedicated to cultivating the next generation of community leaders and public advocates in both the political and policy arenas. The Center does this by offering students practical experience in learning how government policies are created and executed and the impact of public policy decisions on every level of the population. Please go to www.austincc.edu/cppps for more information.

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