

Youth jobs program grows

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Costilla

County leads the way

By LARRY WINGET

SAN LUIS — Costilla County is leading the way in supporting the growing Los Valles Youth Corps' summer jobs program for young people.

Costilla was the first county in the Valley to provide funds for the Los Valles jobs program. On March 31, the county also sponsored a fund-raising luncheon held at the San Luis Museum and Cultural Center, to benefit the program.

Harry Bruell, executive director for Los Valles Youth Corps' parent organization, the Southwest Conservation Corps, said the program started in Costilla County in 2005 and served 15 young job seekers. The SCC is based in Durango, while its LVYC program is based in Alamosa.

Since 2005 the program has been introduced into Conejos, Chaffee, and Saguache counties, with the town of Lake City, in Hinsdale County, participating this year. In 2007 the program is expected to involve 60-plus young workers in the San Luis Valley.

Friday's fundraiser was important for two reasons. First, the more funds available means the more clients to get jobs.

The second involves AmeriCorps Education scholarships for \$1,000 available to some of the participants. Any 17-year-old summer worker who completes eight weeks of employment will automatically qualify for the \$1,000.

The Costilla County government has funded four weeks of the program. Now it is time for the public to step up and make the entire eight-week program a reality. Public donations are necessary to extend the program for the additional four weeks. Without that support, the program's young workers will not qualify for the AmeriCorps money.

Friday's luncheon produced a flurry of donations from those present.

Bruell said, if available, the scholarships could be used at any state college, trade school or vocational training institution that is a Colorado Department of Education Title IV school.

The LVYC has three types of work available.

Its county-based day crew program means Monday through Friday, single shift work for a salary of \$220 per week. Day crews will work within their home county.

The LVYC residential program operates across the Valley. Participants will work and live in the field, camping outdoors near their work projects for 11 days, with three days off, for a salary of \$250 per week.

Crew leaders for the two worker programs are also needed. They will be paid from \$430 to \$480 per week, depending on experience and qualifications.

Most jobs will involve labor to clean roadside ditches, regional cemeteries, hiking trails and other outdoor areas in need of maintenance.

Some Costilla workers will establish as many as three community gardens in the county.

Priscilla Salazar-Martinez is partnering her Sembrando Semillas Project 2007 with the LVYC program. She said Sembrando Semillas (Planting Seeds) is meant to keep Costilla young people on the land, and keep the county's agriculturally zoned land zoned for agriculture.

Her organization, Las Comadres de San Luis, hopes the seed planting and community gardens will teach kids how to grow and preserve their own food and encourage them to maintain an agricultural life-style.

To apply for the LVYC jobs, applicants must complete the Corpsmember Application and submit it to: Program Coordinator, Los Valles Youth Corps, P.O. box 583, Alamosa, CO., 81101. For more information call: (970) 259-8607 ext. 2 or go online to: www.sccorps.org.

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