

## **AmeriCorps program will boost nonprofits**

*Times editorial board*

Volunteerism

The St. Cloud area is bound to benefit from a new AmeriCorps program based on a collaborative effort from St. Cloud State University and eight area nonprofit organizations.

Now all that's needed are the applicants.

Up to 20 people will be chosen to become full-time AmeriCorps members each of the next three years. They will spend 1,700 hours in 11 months working on projects involving youth mentoring, volunteerism/service learning or disaster preparedness with one of the eight organizations.

This program, courtesy of a \$300,000 federal grant, should be a big boost to the organizations, the members who will benefit from the experience and the community as a whole. It should be particularly helpful as many nonprofits cope with increasing demands amid declining resources.

For their service, members earn \$4,725 to help pay for college or future schooling, or to pay off student loans. They also receive a living allowance of \$9,900, loan deferment and health coverage while in the program. More importantly, they gain experience, training and skills that will last a lifetime.

AmeriCorps began taking applications last month, with the goal of selecting 20 members by November. As of Monday, 17 openings remain, program coordinator Jennifer Rausch said.

Partner organizations that will use AmeriCorps members are Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Minnesota, United Way of Central Minnesota, St. Cloud's Retired and Senior Volunteer Program, Catholic Charities, Boys and Girls Club of Central Minnesota, Stearns County Emergency Services, Tri-County Action Program and the American Red Cross. St. Cloud State's primary role is to administer the program, said Richard Rothaus, assistant vice president for research at the university.

AmeriCorps is marking its 10th year of operations nationwide. Its mission is

to get Americans -- especially young adults -- to volunteer in local communities. Nationally, more than 100,000 members have participated, including more than 4,000 Minnesota residents. Those participants alone have earned education awards exceeding \$18 million.

Rausch said this program will provide 10 mentors for at-risk youth, seven people who will focus on volunteerism and service learning, and three people who will work on disaster preparedness. In addition to specific skills learned while working with their nonprofit groups, members will take part in programwide training.

What you can do

Applicants for AmeriCorps must be at least 17 and U.S. citizens, nationals or lawful permanent residents. They must have or be working toward a high school diploma or GED.

For information, contact AmeriCorps Program Coordinator Jennifer Rausch at 308-3050 or e-mail [AmeriCorps@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:AmeriCorps@stcloudstate.edu).