

AmeriCorps volunteers donate 13,000 hours

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St. Cloud AmeriCorps members gave more than 13,000 hours of volunteer service to the community during a recent six-month period.

The local program, which was started a year ago and is based at St. Cloud State University, provided volunteers to nonprofit groups such as the American Red Cross, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Catholic Charities and the United Way of Central Minnesota.

On Thursday, 22 new members of the program will be sworn in for the 2004-05 year.

AmeriCorps is a national service program that's often de-

scribed as the domestic Peace Corps.

It was established in 1993 to engage Americans in volunteer service in local communities. More than 100,000 people nationwide have served with AmeriCorps.

The program in St. Cloud is paid for by a \$300,000 AmeriCorps grant that can be renewed annually for three years.

Full-time AmeriCorps members serve 1,700 hours during their yearlong commitment; part-time members serve 900 hours.

Members receive a living allowance and earn an education award to help pay for college or pay back student loans.

Members also may be eligible for student-loan deferment, health insurance and child care.

The work accomplished by last year's members will be celebrated Thursday during the ceremony for new members.

Their work included helping with the Empty Bowls and Mardi Gras benefits.

They engaged 86 volunteers who visited and read to more than 900 kids at elementary schools and HeadStart centers and established mentoring relationships with more than 200 at-risk youths.

For information about the St. Cloud AmeriCorps program, call Jennifer Rausch at 308-3050.