

**Radio Interview with *Corps Respond*
'Focus on the Community' 91.9 KRVM
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On Good afternoon. Welcome to *Focus on the Community*. Ken Martin here, and with me today, Scott Pursner. Scott is a member of the Northwest Youth Corps *Corps Respond* Team. Now, there's a mouthful. And he's to tell us about the organization, and the work they do, thanks for being here today, Scott.

Well thank you very much for having me, it's an honor and a pleasure to be here on KRVM, the station that receives most of my listening time, be it in the car or at home.

Why thank you Scott. Tell us, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself? How did you get involved and how did the name of the group actually come about?

Well the first question is a lot easier. First again, my name is Scott Pursner. Originally I am from New Jersey. However I moved to Eugene in October. And since graduating college, I've mostly been doing conservation work. Working out in the field, doing things like that.

*Now for that question as to what *Corps Respond* is, it's a little more complicated than that. Now while most groups only get one name, we get three. You see, *Corps Respond* is actually an AmeriCorps group that works in conjunction with Northwest Youth Corps. NYC is a not for profit organization with many facets. However, the main role of the organization is to provide youth with a chance to get outside, work as a team, and get paid doing it. They offer youth a chance to take part in a 5-week program that goes to various locations around the northwest. The youth work on conservation projects. While out there they get technical skills, gain leadership experience, and an appreciation for the environment. And, the best part, they get paid. They like that part the best. The opportunity had changed many people. It's pretty amazing.*

It sure sounds like it, so...tell us why you are a member of a crew like this?

*No. I am a member of a different kind of crew. You see, the youth crews are generally aged 16-19 and they are only out in the field for 5 weeks. My crew is a bit older, meaning we all have Bachelor's degrees, and our term of service is much longer than 5 weeks. We're out for 10 months. There's also three major components of the *Corps Respond* team, and those components are Conservation, Disaster Preparedness, and Leadership Development.*

Sounds like a lot of areas you have to cover. Can you explain more about how the program actually works?

*Of course. This is actually the first real year of *Corps Respond*, so we've been doing a lot of learning and figuring out how our program works ourselves. Now even though 10 months sounds like a long time, it's actually really short. The first three months are primarily trainings and sorting*

out our goals and roles. We each have individual projects to attend to over the course of these 10 months as well. My particular area is trying to find us trainings in Disaster Mental Health.

The second phase is comprised of getting out into the field and working towards conservation goals and affecting people. Not to mention, paying program costs.

(Laughter)

And then the last four months is when we're especially focused on getting out into the community, though we attempt to make ourselves visible throughout the year. We do this by getting out and giving presentations, attending fairs, just getting out there, interacting with community members. That's really one of the best parts.

Wow, that's a lot of things to consider there, Scott. So what kinds of trainings have you had to prepare yourselves for the three aspects you mentioned earlier: conservation, disaster education, and outreach?

We take from a wide range of sources but primarily we have worked with the American Red Cross and taken many of their Disaster Services trainings. Also, we have done many FEMA courses so that we can try to grasp the federal procedures and responses to emergencies. We have also been trained as wilderness first responders.

In fact, when we had our big production, when we actually got to test out our skills as Wilderness First Responders, we did it near the Mt. Pisgah Arboretum. We role-played a logging incident. It was fun, though really serious.

And actually, in the fall we are hoping to work more closely with the Eugene CERT team and get practice in community response to disaster as well.

And have you been able to use your trainings?

In many ways yes. Personally and professionally, I've had ways to use them. The way that I communicate and assess situations is a lot different now. Also, the way that I work in general has changed. I'm much more careful about what I am doing and how I strain my body. You have to be when you are using a chainsaw.

(Laughter)

But speaking of using the trainings we receive, just the other day I was going to a movie and a man on the street had a seizure on the street. While my partner called 911, I was able to help assess the situation and monitor/comfort the man as best possible before paramedics responded. That's a hell of a feeling.

I bet it is, I bet it is. Good example about putting your training to actual use. So how often have you been able to get out there and talk to community members?

My crew loves to get out there and talk to the community; however, the conservation aspect of our work has kind of been taking precedence since May. We have spent a whole lot of time in the field,

doing projects to help restore ecosystems or help the Forest Service with areas they are planning for doing prescribed burns in.

Prescribed burns? You mean you have fire training too?

Oh, yes. I forgot about that one. We've been through many programs.

Well that's pretty amazing stuff. Tell me a little bit more about the crew. What kind of backgrounds do you have? How do you get work like this?

Well, while we're all college graduates, as I said, and we have all different backgrounds. In fact my major was International Studies with a minor in African American and Ethnic Studies. Sadly, my abilities in French have not been of use yet. I was told though by an Oregon Congressman that I'd very useful should my crew happen upon a 250 year old frozen French Lumberman.

There you go.

And for the rest of my crew, we have people bridging the spectrum, from having had majors in marine biology to philosophy, to fish and wildlife management. For next year's crew, the joke is to ask if they've had any of the following areas of study under their belts. I figure, we'll have a few confused faces, but it'll work itself out.

I bet it will. Well you sure are a diverse group. Now you've said that you've been all around working. Where have you been? And then, what have you done in the Eugene area.

Well we've officially worked in all states along the Pacific coast including Arizona. Arizona is actually the longest state we worked at, we were there working on trail for five weeks. And then here in Oregon, we've been near The Dalles, near Bandon, over by Diamond Lake, and Detroit Lake and up in Saddle Mountain near Vernonia. Have you ever been to Saddle Mountain?

No I haven't.

It's really beautiful over there; you get to see Five Peaks, and the Pacific. We get some miles on us. You learn to love the rig we drive in, well it's more a love hate relationship sometimes but it makes seating in airplane seem ample now.

In the Eugene area more specifically, we took part in a service day in Marcola on Dr. King's birthday. We helped at the Flower festival in Mt. Pisgah. We had a booth over at the University of Oregon. Oh we also participated in Safety Fest. Did you go?

No I couldn't, although I heard a lot about it.

I was lucky enough to be McGruff the Crime dog.

Good for you.

I had many chances to take bites out of crime through out the day.

So you've spoken quite a bit about all you other aspects of your Corps Respond group. Tell me more about what you do with disaster preparedness?

When it comes to disaster preparedness, the crew is once again split into groups. Each researches and works in a specific area of disaster such as seismics, atmospheric, and fire. I am in the atmospheric group. I've spent quite a bit of time at weather.com, needless to say.

Since we have been doing this research and taking these courses, it's Corps Respond's hope that we might be able to better serve the community in a few ways.

First is by honing in our presentations to address the kinds of issues those asking us to speak are concerned with. Coming up, we currently have some Lions Club events down in Medford and Bandon. Also, we want to bring together what we've taken from our Red Cross, and FEMA trainings to give a comprehensive amount of information that might help people see disaster situations from mitigation practices to after the disaster should happen. We want all-around education.

Secondly, we would like to try and tie in with community disaster response organizations such as the Red Cross, local fire departments, etc in order help others in times of crisis.

Third, we would like to work with some local schools in order to help children feel more comfortable and prepared in case of an emergency.

Fourth, is to try and serve as a response center for those in the community who might want information or have a question about who to contact in order to get information pertaining to disaster x y or z.

And lastly, we just want people to be better prepared even if it is just by reading some of our literature.

I think that's the thing. Lots of times, people have questions about these types of concerns, and they don't quite know where to go. Red Cross would come to a lot of people's mind as a starting point, but it sounds like you and your group has a lot to offer in terms of community outreach. How have your outreach efforts been going so far?

Well it's been going. Getting the hang of drawing people into our booth etc and keeping their attention is sometimes difficult. When you talk about disaster, people are kind of leery. At times you feel like an insurance salesman but without the glory. We are cheaper though. The pamphlets and information are all free. I think of it as an amazing challenge, because if we are able to help people and give back to the community in a way that helps them help themselves, then it's all worth it, ya know?

That's right, what kind of information do you have at these booths and presentations?

Well, we are working on a couple of things now but currently we have lots of information brochures. One explaining the kinds of situations which could take place in the Pacific Northwest, and one explaining what a 72 hour kit is.

I've heard a lot about a 72 hour kit. Tell us more.

During an emergency, people can be trapped or in need of assistance for up to 72 hours before a rescue group could possibly come to their aid. So this kit is basically a bunch of things around your house that if you stored them together in a container, a waterproof container, you'd have the essentials to help yourself, until help arrived. And you could always add to the list to personalize it.

Well, what kind of items?

Well simple things you'd have around your house anyways - batteries, blankets, water, canned food. Candles, things like that.

...Kind of a "grab and go" kit you could have right there and head out the door with just a moments notice.

Precisely.

Well, we are running close to our time limit Scott, but before we go, Scott where are you and your crew going to be next?

Well next week we will be at Umatilla County. We're going to be at the fair from the 11 TO THE 15, and then we'll have a booth at the Oregon State Fair in Salem. We'll also be at the Eugene Celebration. It's a busy and exciting time coming up.

Also, right now we are trying to contact people and groups in Eugene to do presentations and work more closely within the Eugene community. If people are interested in getting contact with us, please feel free. You can contact me at scott@nwyouthcorps.org or call us at 541-349-7510.

Well, sounds good, once again, Scott's email is scott@nwyouthcorps.org. And their phone number locally is 349-7510. Scott Thanks so much for coming by. This has been really interesting and insightful, and KRVM will have a booth at the Eugene Celebration so we'll look for you guys there too.

Well thank you. I would like to also thank KRVM for letting us come and also to our funders who made us possible in the first place. They say that Northwest Youth Corps is the best kept secret in the Northwest. We're trying to make the Corps Respond team and NYC more than that. This has been a great experience.

Thanks for being our guest this week on *Focus on the Community* Friday afternoons at KRVM.