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Groundwork Jacksonville Green Team Develops STEM, Leadership Skills Program Provides Inner City Youth the Opportunity to Discover the Outdoors and Become Stewards of the City's Greenspace

Jacksonville, Fla 6/23/15 - Trash, river algae blooms, the declining bee population and air pollution are some of the environmental concerns cited by local high school students selected for Groundwork Jacksonville's inaugural Green Team Summer Leadership Camp. The initiative that kicks off tomorrow with a kayaking expedition near Huguenot Memorial Park and vista clearing maintenance at the National Park Service's Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve, will give ten young people the opportunity to connect with the environment while they build leadership skills, and possibly find a future career in the environmental sciences.

The Green Team is a nationwide program of Groundwork USA that works with over 200 youth ages 14 to 18 each year. This curriculum has been developed to teach youth through hands-on activities, group interaction and demonstration of quality work practices, and to provide career path planning. Members of the Groundwork Jacksonville Green Team will help build trails and maintain parks, assist with urban gardening programs, organize river cleanups and help coordinate volunteer projects while becoming stewards of the environment around them. Each will receive a summer stipend as well as community service hours for their work. Finally, a member of the Green Team will also have the opportunity to attend a Yellowstone National Park Green Corps Experience and the Groundwork Jacksonville Annual Conference and Youth Summit in Estes Park, Colorado, all expenses paid.

Funding for the Green Team Summer Leadership Camp was provided by both private and public sources totaling \$80,000. The National Park Service awarded Groundwork Jacksonville through the Outdoor Foundation's 2014 Challenge Cost Share Program to promote urban outreach, youth engagement and connect people to the outdoors. Locally, Wells Fargo also donated to the youth initiative.

According to Alyssa Bourgoyne, Green Team coordinator, "We have a wonderfully diverse and enthusiastic group of students representing Historic Springfield and the Eastside. Our goal is to ensure that the team develops a closer connection to nature and their community, as well as develops leadership and stewardship skills to make a positive impact in their neighborhoods and throughout the city."

Members of the inaugural Green Team Summer Leadership Camp are:

Eduardo Soriano, age 17 - senior at Darnell Cookman School of the Medical Arts
Breona Green, age 18 - graduate of Darnell Cookman School of the Medical Arts, attending Flagler College in the fall
Johnathon Poole, age 16 - senior at Andrew Jackson High School
Aaliyah Walker, age 15 - sophomore at Andrew Jackson High School
Sydney Ricard, age 15 - sophomore at Paxon School for Advanced Studies
Keshawn Curry, age 17 - junior at Andrew Jackson High School
April Bailey, age 17 - senior at Darnell Cookman School of the Medical Arts
Sha'ron Rogers, age 16 - junior at Andrew Jackson High School
Jaden Gulama, age 16 - sophomore at Andrew Jackson High School
Nathaniel Jones 15 - freshman at Episcopal High School

The Green Team Summer Leadership Camp consists of six work days that begin with a safety discussion, include an educational component and end with a journaling activity so that students can reflect on their experiences. The camp concludes on August 29, with a graduation celebration and family barbeque. Dates and projects include:

Wednesday, June 24: Kayaking expedition near Huguenot Memorial Park and river vista clearing at NPS-Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve

Monday, June 29: Klutho Park community service landscaping project and disc golf clinic

Tuesday, July 7: St. Johns River tour and nature trail building on Exchange Club Island, and afternoon spent at Jacksonville University's Marine Science Research Institute

Wednesday, July 15: Park maintenance and hiking at NPS-Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve

Tuesday, August 4: Nature trail building and scavenger hunt on the Exchange Club Island and afternoon spent at Jacksonville University's Marine Science Research Institute

August 6-14: Youth leader and one Green Team member join other Groundwork Green Teams from across the nation for the Yellowstone National Park Green Corps Experience hosted and funded by Groundwork USA

Saturday, August 22: Eastside Environmental Justice Tour and A. Philip Randolph Park community service tree planting project, followed by lunch with city council members

Saturday, August 29: Behind the scenes tour and leadership training at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens followed by Green Team graduation and family BBQ

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About Groundwork Jacksonville

Groundwork Jacksonville envisions a future of Historic Springfield and Eastside that includes healthy neighborhoods free of brownfields and other toxic sites, clean waters for our children to play and fish, well-maintained scenic parks for the entire city to enjoy and the development of a community stewardship ethic that ensures these positive community changes are guaranteed for the future. Founded in Jacksonville in 2014, Groundwork Jacksonville is a partnership between the City of Jacksonville, US National Park Service, US Environmental Protection Agency and Groundwork USA, Inc. and is part of the Groundwork USA network. Learn more at www.GroundworkJacksonville.org