



Groundwork Profiles

Eduardo Guzman

GWUSA worked with Judy Knuth Folts and Bob Fuhrmann at Yellowstone National Park (YNP) to create an opportunity for Groundwork youth to work at the Park. In addition to the extensive amount of work the youth do back in their hometowns, they get to spend a week working at YNP with Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) staff. This helps the youth connect their efforts at home to broader conservation efforts across America.

Working a few yards away from Old Faithful, Yellowstone National Park's (and the world's) most famous geyser is a powerful experience. Yet Eduardo Soriano Guzman hardly took his gaze off the stone wall he was building. The 17 year-old was part of a week-long corps program created by Yellowstone and Groundwork USA, a nonprofit founded by the National Park Service (NPS) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to do urban greening projects.

"My parents grew up in the countryside in Mexico," Guzman explained, "but I grew up living in the city." Guzman loved going to Ringhaver Park in his hometown of Jacksonville, Florida, and playing outdoors. "Ever since I was a little kid, I loved science, especially environmental science, and in high school I studied the subject as an elective." His environmental science teacher told Guzman about a summer job program with Groundwork Jacksonville. Guzman applied for the program and was hired this past June.

Groundwork's mission is to work with communities on brownfield remediation, urban waterways restoration and other green projects. As part of that effort, Groundwork recruits local youth, trains them in environmental restoration, and engages them in work projects that green their community. For their service some of

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the youth are selected to travel to Yellowstone. Judy Knuth-Folts (Deputy Chief of Resource Education and Youth Programs) and Bob Fuhrmann (Youth and Volunteer Program Manager) created the program funded largely by a generous grant from NPS. "The first national park I ever visited was Timcuan Ecological and Historic Preserve with Groundwork. "We worked brushing the understory and restored a view of the St. John's River not visible since the 50's. Now people can not only see the river, but hear it flowing also!" He beamed. "But Yellowstone is absolutely amazing!" He continued, "The work is hard, but you can see the change you are making. When I look back at this wall I can say 'I did that.'"

Asked how his time at Yellowstone has impacted him, Guzman responds, "Being here opened my mind to so many ideas. When you see things cleaned up or fixed, you get attached to it and want to see it preserved." Guzman about spoke how he had wanted to study medicine but his short stay in Yellowstone had changed that. "Now I want to do something more connected to

nature." Guzman paused. "Being here you feel that deep connection to nature in your heart that you now realize was always there, and I love the feeling of that."

The week-long corps program is held in conjunction with Yellowstone's Youth Conservation Corps co-directed by Mike Coonan and Ali Yeates. "The staff here are so friendly...I'm so attached to them, especially to our crew leader Alicia. She's so outgoing, so dedicated, and always puts off a good vibe," Guzman said smiling.

The National Park Service has just launched its "Find Your Park" campaign, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Park Service in 2016. Guzman offered up his advice on how to get more youth connected to the parks. "What I would do is to get people involved right there in Jacksonville. I would put the youth to work cleaning up some local park. I mean, Yellowstone National Park is federally protected and a long ways away, but when local youth clean up their own environment they fall in love with it. They see why it needs to be preserved. Protecting their local park or river will make them want to see other natural places preserved as well. They'll want to visit more parks...even Yellowstone."

DEDICATED TO CHANGING PLACES AND CHANGING LIVES, GROUNDWORK USA, DEVELOPED WITH NATIONAL PARK SERVICE SUPPORT, IS A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION WITH LOCAL ROOTS, WORKING TO REVITALIZE NEIGHBORHOODS AND TRANSFORM COMMUNITY LIABILITIES INTO ASSETS.

