

Being selfless sometimes means being selfish

My friend called me an "inveterate do-gooder." I think she's wrong. I am, in general, a selfish person.

That's why I'm moving 1,144 miles across the country to work 40 to 50 hours a week at hard labor for \$750 a month.

Sound like a charitable plan? Be assured, it's quite self-serving.

It's AmeriCorps. And it will allow me to spend a year in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, basking in the Colorado sun (which shines approximately 300 days a year) with a team of comrades trying to make the world a little better place.

As a member of the Larimer County Youth Conservation Corps in Fort Collins, I'll join forces with 15 peers to conserve the area's environmental and educational resources. Four days a week, we'll haul logs and spread mulch in the Colorado wilderness, and one day a week, we'll prod young minds through reading books and math problems in Fort Collins elementary schools.

Sure, we'll toil and sweat, but in my utopian vision of the scene, we'll also forge lasting friendships and memories.

As I begin apartment-hunting in this college city with a magnificent



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mountain backdrop and quaint Old Town center, I'm convinced this is not a selfless move on my part. This is a move toward adventure, amusement, self-exploration.

I'll miss my friends. Most of those with whom I marched in May, mortarboard and tassel in place, across the stage at Butler University, are well on their way to respectable careers. I applaud their ambition and direction, but, for me, a career can wait.

It has to wait because I can't wait any longer.

I can't wait to begin my year of service. To break out of my Midwest comfort zone. To be in the company of people who value volunteerism and community service as much as I do.

It has to wait because, since I learned about AmeriCorps last year, it's the only thing I've wanted.

Applying for and being accepted

into AmeriCorps is no easy process. There are four to five enthusiastic applicants for every available spot, and as with most federal programs, a shortage of funds and surplus of red tape.

Once accepted, completing the 1,700 required hours of service also is not easy. Corps veterans tell stories of 10-hour workdays and recurring meals of bologna and rice. Corps members scrape by on a meager monthly stipend and food stamps, some of them working a second job to make ends meet.

Upon completion of their service, corps members receive a \$4,725 education award (to be used for further education or student loan repayment) – a nice gesture, to be sure, but only enough to put a dent in education expenses.

Still, I'm certain that on the scale of true wealth, the AmeriCorps experience will outweigh any application headaches, financial woes and sub-par suppers.

I read somewhere that, "Even altruism is selfish." How true. I will gain so much from a year of volunteer service. It may be the most selfish thing I've ever done.

To find out more about AmeriCorps, visit www.americorps.org.

■ Vaerewyck, of LaPorte, recently graduated from Butler University with a degree in journalism.

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