

# LCC Does It Again!



Alejandro Lopez (center left) with Ken Salazar, U.S. Secretary of the Interior

Once again, an LCC Corpsmember has brought home The Corps Network's Corpsmember of the Year Award – a prestigious award recognizing at-risk youth and young adults who have dramatically turned their lives around. This year, the honor went to Alejandro Lopez – a former gang member who, since enrolling in LCC, has taken major strides in his life. Lopez, along with five others, was selected from among 30,000 Corpsmembers nationwide. He was presented with his award last month in Washington D.C.

For Alejandro, LCC Director Shawn Riggins, LCC Assistant Director Sue Carter, and CalGRIP Manager Marcelino Salazar, the would-have-been five-day trip to our nation's capital began with a grueling 30-hour journey by plane, train, and automobile through three states plus the District of Columbia in blizzard-like conditions. The group was scheduled to attend The Corps Network Annual Corps Forum where Alejandro would receive recognition as Corpsmember of the Year and our LCC would receive an award for national "Project of the Year" for their work in constructing the Neighborhood Youth Center, LCC's new headquarters. They weren't going to let flight cancellations and three feet of snow deter them from seeing Alejandro accept his award.

After what seemed like an eternity of traveling, the foursome finally arrived in a snow blanketed and chaotic Washington, D.C. Alejandro was able to share his story and receive his award in front of hundreds of people including U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, Mark Greenberg with the Department of Health and Human Services, and Robert Shireman with the Department of Education. He was also able to get a tour of the White House; he was not, however, able to participate in a town hall meeting with U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer, meet with U.S. Representative Devin Nunes, or stay in DC all five days as a second snowstorm was about to hit the eastern seaboard, dumping yet another foot of snow.

Alejandro started his career with LCC in the fall of 2007 – shortly after being released from OH Close Youth Correctional Facility in Stockton; he served two years of a nine year sentence at California Youth Authority for his involvement in a gang-related activity. The now 20-year-old has since enrolled in LCC's California Gang Reduction and Intervention Program (CalGRIP), earned his high school diploma from SOUL, earned two AmeriCorps Education Awards totaling more than \$7,000, received on-the-job training, and became a husband and a father, as well as a first-time homeowner. He is also registered as a part-time student at Fresno City College earning credits toward his Associate in Science Degree in Electrical Systems Technology.

In his spare time, Alejandro – an avid fisherman and member of the Central Valley Sportsman Club – participates in numerous community events and fundraisers for schools in the Fresno-Clovis area. Last summer, he helped raise money to provide recent high school graduates with college scholarships.

“I really am thankful for the opportunity The Corps has given me,” says Lopez. “I plan on someday returning back to the Youth Authority as a motivational speaker to inspire others to change their lives. I would like to let others know that people can change for the better and inform them that there are programs and people that are willing to help young offenders such as The Corps and its staff.”



Alejandro shares his story of triumph during The Corps Network Annual Corps Forum in Washington D.C.

Corpsmember of the Year have completed at least one year of service in their community and have worked on a variety of projects including: environmental restoration projects; disaster relief; green building; field education and training; and landscape maintenance. These individuals also took leadership roles, acting as mentors, crew leaders and representatives of their Corps at other national gatherings. More importantly, these young men and women have performed at high levels of excellence, delivered valued contributions to their communities through services, and through their actions have also demonstrated qualities of character that make them outstanding representatives of Corpsmembers from across the nation.

Alejandro is the fifth Fresno Corpsmember in six years to be honored with this distinguished award.

Congratulations Alejandro!



Left to Right: Sue Carter, LCC Assistant Director; Marcelino Salazar, CalGRIP Manager; Alejandro Lopez; and Shawn Riggins, LCC Director

## Helping people. Changing lives.

EOC's Local Conservation Corps California Gang Reduction Intervention and Prevention Program (CalGRIP), an anti-gang initiative by California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, targets more than \$48 million in state and federal funding toward local anti-gang efforts, including job training, education, and intervention programs.

EOC's CalGRIP funding supports released offenders and gang members, ages 18-24, with job training and education at the Local Conservation Corps. Participants engage in a 13-week paid job-training program where they learn skills in construction, landscaping, network cabling, and welding. An additional 20 youth, ages 14-18, incarcerated at the Juvenile Justice Campus, receive the same type of job training services. The incarcerated training component is non-paid.

CalGRIP also offers an awareness component, the Another Way Program, to high school students at Teilman Community Day School. The program gives students an opportunity to see first hand how their decisions affect their future. Students tour the Valley State Prison for Women, Chowchilla, and Kern Valley State Prison, as well as educational institutions such as California State University, Fresno, and Fresno City College.

Each participant receives support services including case management and counseling and mentoring by faith-based leaders.

For more information, please contact CalGRIP at 559.264.1048.