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For immediate release

Minnesota GreenCorps member uses gap year to hone career path

For some young adults, a gap year is a time to get away from their studies, to see the world or volunteer. Not Delia Denis.

After grabbing the second of two diplomas this past spring – one from Faribault High School and the other acknowledging her associate’s degree from South Central College -- Denis decided it was time to see where her interest in the environment might take her. Turns out, she didn’t have to go far.

This fall, Denis started an 11-month stint as a member of the [Minnesota GreenCorps](#), hosted by none other than her home county’s Environmental Services Department. The program, coordinated by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, “aims to preserve and protect Minnesota’s environment while training a new generation of environmental professionals.”

Rice County, meanwhile, provides office space; training, mentoring and supervision; and at least \$300 for workshops.

Denis, who says a Faribault High School counselor recommended she consider the program, says her work will not only give her real world experience, but help her see the array of jobs available in the field.

“I figured it would be a really good experience and I wanted to see if this is what I really want to do.”

Denis has already begun working on an internal composting project and planning a countywide challenge to help reduce food waste for early next year.

“I’m excited for that,” she said.

The food rescue project will build upon work done by Rice County’s previous GreenCorps member.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, between 30% and 40% of the food supply is never eaten. Food waste is the single most common material landfilled and incinerated in the U.S.

Denis, who has volunteered at the Community Action Center in Faribault, says seeing firsthand how fast food flew off the shelves helped her understand how great the need is locally.



Minnesota GreenCorps member Delia Denis, right, answers questions about recycling last month during a Rice County employee Wellness event. (Rice County photo)

She'd also love to get more grocery stores and local restaurants to donate to local food shelves, though she understands that rules around ensuring certain items remain at proper temperatures and haven't been inadvertently contaminated must be considered.

She dreams of launching initiatives that would focus on reuse or have community members providing quick repairs for electronics that might otherwise end up in the county landfill.

While she's leaning toward a career in environmental engineering, Denis is anxious to discover other possible careers, noting that the Environmental Services Department, which covers everything from planning and zoning to feedlots and water resource management, is just the place to dig in.

"It's nice to be here and see how things work on the inside," she said.

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