

## Looking Toward the Future

With the Summer Youth Employment Program in full swing, sights are starting to change. The hard work that the youth is putting in is evident in Gratiot County. Park trails are being cleared and widened, park beaches are being cleaned, and our villages are getting much needed attention after state-wide budget cuts.

In Breckenridge this week, we met with two crews, hard at work. The Breckenridge Community Schools crew was busy cleaning and preparing the school, for students to return in August. While at the High School we spoke with several youth who were busy scrubbing floors, windows, and walls. Crystal Wood, 16, and Ryan Eastman, 18, both from St. Louis, gave us a little insight into the daily duties. Ryan, a 2008 graduate, told us he is usually busy changing light bulbs and scrubbing the walls in the schools. Both Ryan and Crystal told us they have never had an experience like this before.

While exiting Ryan and Crystal's work area we came across a more than enthusiastic, Cherri Zimmerman. Cherri, employed as a custodian for Breckinridge Public Schools, supervises the youth involved in the Summer Youth Employment Program. Cherri enjoys teaching good standards of work, such as a good work ethic, and being on time and doing your best, which will benefit them for the rest of their lives. Cherri's most important message that she relays to the program youth is, "there's nothing wrong with hard physical labor. You don't have to sit at a desk job as long as you earn an honest living, be proud!"

She feels the program is a very good opportunity for the kids because it gives them jumpstart into the workforce in a time when its very hard for kids to find jobs. Cherri has teenage children of her own, and last year her daughter helped with the school cleaning. As her first job it was a very good experience for her and she is now working at the Soaring Eagle Casino doing housekeeping. The work experience she got from cleaning the school helped her get her current position.



Zach Lapointe crew leader for the Village of Breckenridge Crew.

Around the corner from the high school we found the Village of Breckenridge crew, digging out dirt and cleaning drain pipe areas. The sight crew leader, Zach Lapointe, got involved with the Michigan Works! program after hearing about it from a friend. He's been busy trying to teach the youth that, "this is a good work experience, not just a summer job."

Although this is his first time supervising, he feels its important that the workers learn to show responsibility in getting to work on time and to be punctual. Zach is an education major and feels this will also be a great experience while working towards his own career goals.



Ryan Eastman, 18, washes the walls at Breckenridge Community Schools.



Logan Sherman, digging grass away from a drain pipe in the Village of Breckenridge.