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Clearing the way



ROSE SHIELDS / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Burlington County College's Pinelands Institute for Natural and Environmental Studies, commonly known as PINES, and its AmeriCorps Leader Program teamed Monday to clear a trail in Whitesbog Village in Pemberton Township. The students plan to dedicate the trail to Dr. James Still. A self-taught doctor who studied medical botany, Still developed and distributed botanical remedies throughout South Jersey. A formal dedication is planned for around Still's birthday on April 9.

ON THE TRAIL OF HISTORY

Burlington County College students spend a day of service creating a path in Dr. James Still's honor.

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PEMBERTON TOWNSHIP — Although schools were closed Monday to observe Martin Luther King Jr.'s 81st birthday, Burlington County College students used the national day of service to clear the way for an outdoor classroom in the Pinelands.

More than 20 students, staff and other volunteers spent the day creating a walking trail in a forested area within Whitesbog Village off Route 530.

The college's Pinelands Institute for Natural and Environmental Studies, commonly known as PINES, and its AmeriCorps Leader Program teamed on the project.

"The Pinelands is so important to the state of New Jersey," PINES director Christine Lipsack said. "We preserve 1.1 million acres. We're hoping that by educating the younger children about it, they can go home and teach others about it. They're going to be our future protectors of our environment."

The program operates in conjunction with the Brendan T. Byrne State Forest to provide teachers with science and social



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Sanket Raval, 19, a Burlington County college student and AmeriCorps volunteer, struggles to remove branches.

studies field trips in which students study the environment and history of the Pine Barrens.

Lipsack said the PINES program provides trips to all areas of the Pinelands for students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade.

"We thought this would be a nice place to build another trail," Lipsack said. "There are a lot of medicinal plants out here, and we show the students how the Lenape (Indians) used to collect plants for medicinal use."

Students spent the day raking, clearing brush, and trimming back low-hanging branches on trees. They dug out large stumps that protruded from the ground and



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Stephanie Crain, a volunteer from Fort Dix who heard about the need to clear this trail, came out on her own to help.

lined the trail with logs to keep visitors from treading on the hundreds of protected plant species that grow in the Pinelands.

They smoothed the dirt to create the trail that winds about a quarter-mile through the woods beside a shallow creek not far from the Whitesbog Village General Store.

Lipsack said the winter is the best time of year to build a trail because the woods aren't overgrown. She said the students will spend another four days preparing the trail before it officially opens in the spring.

The students plan to dedicate the trail to Dr. James Still. Known as the "black doctor of the Pines," Still was born the son of escaped slaves in 1812 in Shamong.

A self-taught doctor who studied medical botany, he developed and distributed botanical remedies throughout South Jersey.

A formal dedication is planned for around Still's birthday on April 9 and Lipsack said she plans to invite members of his family to the ceremony.

"It's exciting to kick off a year of service like this and set that tone, especially in remembrance of Dr. Martin Luther King and Dr. Still," said Monnica Chan, coordinator of BCC's AmeriCorps community service program.

Lipsack said the trail will eventually include markers to identify plant species and summarize Still's work and life.

Tom Cordon, an Eastampton resident and BCC student, said it was important to use the day of service to honor the two men.

"I think this can really make a difference for people in our community, and that's why I'm here," Cordon said. "It's a good way to honor the people who have made a difference in our history."



Tierra Harper, 19, an AmeriCorps volunteer from Pemberton Township, removes cat briar from a trail in Whitesbog Village on Monday. Burlington County College's Pinelands Institute for Natural and Environmental Studies and its AmeriCorps Leader Program teamed to clear a trail meant to honor Dr. James Still.