



STAFF PHOTO/JACK HALEY

Canandaigua Academy graduate Josh Knoblock is tutoring and mentoring disadvantaged children in New York City .

Canandaigua grad helps city kids

He grew up a country boy but decided to spend a year in Queens helping kids who could use a leg up.

By **JULIE SHERWOOD**

Messenger Post Staff

CANANDAIGUA — It's a far cry from Ontario County, with its rolling hills, lakes, cornfields and cow pastures. The Queens neighborhood in New York City where Josh Knoblock is spending a year is lined with auto-repair shops and industrial smokestacks. The kids who attend the public schools where he volunteers like hooded sweatshirts and rap music, and some of them only speak Spanish. Most are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

Unlike Canandaigua Academy, "there's not a lot of Abercrombie & Fitch here," said Knoblock, a 2004 CA grad.

He likes that.

What Knoblock, 21, likes even more is the kids themselves at the three public schools in the borough's Long Island City, where he does everything from teaching reading to playing games. It's not always a piece of cake keeping the kids focused, on task, he said. "It can be a rough system," said Knoblock, who had been feeling kind of restless himself since he graduated, working a few jobs and putting in a semester at Finger Lakes Community College.

"I wasn't ready to go to college," he said. Then Leanna Landsmann, a family friend who volunteers with a service organization called City Year

invited him to look into the program. By the end of a day meeting kids in the Long Island City schools, he was hooked.

The kids wanted him there, he said. "They asked if I could drive from upstate."

The answer was 'yes.'

On Sept. 28, Knoblock joined the ranks of some 1,500 young adults in 17 cities across the United States who are volunteers with City Year, a member of the national service network, AmeriCorps. Volunteers find and pay for their own living arrangements in exchange for training

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and some perks. Corps members get a cell phone, free metro pass, and uniform clothing that includes fleece vest, boots, shirts, jacket and backpack.

Knoblock, who is living in the South Bronx with friends, said each day begins early with a "unity rally" with other corps members.

The routine includes physical training and emphasizes a discipline and "can-do" attitude the volunteers are expected to bring to their work with the kids.

"Josh is positive, just terrific," said David R. Caplan, an Illinois native and retired CEO in the fashion industry who became a City Year volunteer four years ago after attending a City Year benefit. Most of those attending were kids themselves, he said. "I felt the energy and enthusiasm." Now Caplan heads up fund-raising activities for the organization, which also receives a portion of its funding from the federal government.

Knoblock said his work involves kids mainly in elementary and middle school. He reads with the kids, tutors them in academics — both in groups and one-on-one — and leads activities aimed at getting the kids to make healthy decisions and be good citizens. The activities involve games, skits, debates, discussions.

"We take the place of gangs because gangs are good recruiters," said Caplan.

Knoblock's grandfather, Dick Knoblock of Bristol Street, said he enjoyed hearing first-hand about Josh's experiences when Josh was home for Thanksgiving.

"This will be an experience he will never forget," he said.

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

Josh Knoblock is working with elementary school kids in a Queens neighborhood, where he will serve as a volunteer until next summer.

What is City Year?

The national community service organization places some 1,500 young adults annually in volunteer roles helping disadvantaged kids in cities.

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CANANDAIGUA — City Year was founded in 1988 by Michael Brown and Alan Khazei, then-roommates at Harvard Law School, who felt that young adults in community service could be a powerful

way to address our nation's most pressing issues. The organization began as an eight-week program in Boston, with fifty volunteers and five founding sponsors. Today City Year places 1,500 young adults annually in volunteer roles in 17 cities, along with sites in South Africa.

City Year is a member of AmeriCorps national service network. It also has partnerships with corporations, schools, and nonprofits, who support its mission of promoting national community service as a way to build a stronger democracy.

For more information, visit cityyear.org. Contact Julie Sherwood at (585) 394-0770, Ext. 263, or at jsherwood@mpnews-papers.com

