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Christopher R. Johnson

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STUDENT EDITORIAL

Life Between the Lakes: A Student's Perspective of a Summer Internship

The day had been long, and it was far from being over. The blazing sun and monotonous rumble of my '78 Chevy Blazer had drained the energy from me more efficiently than any prescription depressant could ever hope to. The eight-hour drive between home and my summer internship left me with plenty of time for speculation. As Kentucky Route 68 East gave way to a tall, narrow webbing of silvery steel, I asked myself, "Chris, what have you gotten yourself into?"

There was no answer.

As I crossed the bridge, I mentally reviewed all that I knew about my summer employer. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) is an independent corporate agency of the federal government. Created by an act of Congress in 1933, TVA is best known for its electrical production. However, it is also a world leader in environmental protection, water resource management, flood control, community development, agriculture, and forestry.

In 1963, President John F. Kennedy announced that TVA would develop the 170,000-acre peninsula between Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley (in western Kentucky and Tennessee) as the first national demonstration area in outdoor recreation and environmental education. This rugged, wooded, park-like expanse became known as Land Between the Lakes (LBL) and is currently managed under a multiple use philosophy using integrated resource management. The serene beauty and diversity of recreational opportunity makes LBL seem like a nature lover's fantasy.

In 1964, LBL developed an intern program (for undergraduate students) which expanded, in 1986, to include an apprentice program for college graduates. Both apprentices and interns receive a weekly stipend and free housing. The goals of the LBL intern/apprentice program are fourfold: to establish LBL as a national training center for future professionals, to provide quality training and practical experience for students in a wide range of disciplines, to introduce the students to the operational procedures of a federal agency, and to provide additional quality experiences for the diverse population that comes to LBL.

As I reached the end of the bridge connecting society to this paradise, I had no idea to what degree these goals would be fulfilled. The attractions which induced me to spend a summer in Golden Pond, Kentucky were the professionalism of the staff with whom I spoke (notably, Professional Development Coordinator Jim Carpenter), the promises that I received, and the enthusiasm of my supervisor (Thomas D. Forsythe, Ph.D.). Three months later, I had answers to all my questions. Looking back now, I can honestly say that there is nowhere I have felt as comfortable and natural as "between the lakes."

I believe that the strong point of LBL's internship falls under providing quality, practical experience for future professionals. Upon arrival in Kentucky, I was given an orientation, assigned an office, and expected to perform like any staff member. My first major task met the description "proposal writing." I worked on all the phases of developing a proposal (from methodology to identifying funding sources) to re-establish a native tall grass prairie.

From here, I moved on to projects as diverse as the land itself. I worked on hardwood restoration projects, multimedia presentations, foundation stabilization studies, and even the cutting and hauling of brush for making a "fish attractor" site to aid recreational fishermen. I helped organize a Career Awareness Seminar for minority college students, shared in the writing of public handouts for an information meeting about UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program, gave a lecture to a graduate school seminar, and helped plan and design paid advertisements for national magazines.

In terms of preparing my professional skills, LBL provided all it promised and more. I worked as a full-time conservation professional for twelve weeks during my undergraduate years—an experience as rare as the beauty of western Kentucky.

By working in the administration office, I was able to experience the daily workings of a federal agency. After meeting the challenges, personal interactions, and rewards of federal employment, I have ascertained that federal conservation is the career to which I am willing to devote a lifetime.

LBL certainly provided me with innumerable "quality experiences." My supervisor was professionally and personally outstanding. The entire staff was friendly and helpful. Fellow interns/apprentices were enjoyable, and many planned activities brought us together socially. The provided housing was of excellent quality, and any minor problems were quickly solved.

Although my weeks as an intern are over and my education is nearly complete, I still affectionately hold all that LBL invested in me. The skills I gained will never be lost. The friends and contacts I met will

never be forgotten. The meeting of Teresa, the girl of my dreams, stands as a decisive event in itself. Many special times and scenes can always be relived in memory. If a student is willing to work, learn, and enjoy life, look no further than LBL.

CHRISTOPHER R. JOHNSON

For internship information, contact:
Jim Carpenter
Professional Development Coordinator
Land Between the Lakes—TVA
Golden Pond, KY 42231
(502) 924-5602