

c. Union-News

## For many, summit sounds call to arms

*Editor's note: This story on the presidential summit on voluntarism is part of a year-long series on extraordinary efforts to improve communities and aid neighbors.*

**By MARIE GRADY**

PHILADELPHIA - For Springfield, Mass., delegates here to attend a national voluntarism rally, perhaps former President Jimmy Carter best spoke of the enormity of the task.

"We have two Americas. One of them is a rich nation with a decent home in which to live and adequate health care and education . . . But we have a lot of neighbors who don't have any of those things."

On this weekend, there were also two Philadelphias. One where lost souls could be found curled up on the pavement of the occasional sidewalk in this city of brotherly love. And one in which volunteers in retired Gen. Colin Powell's "new army" were sweeping debris off streets and painting over graffiti in a neighborhood of rowhouses in Germantown.

For Carol Kinsley, executive director of the Community Service Learning Center in Springfield, the mission of the three-day Presidents' Summit for America's Future was clear: Build a future for America's children before the world crumbles around the men and women they will become.

For more than a decade, Kinsley has been doing that through community service learning, or integrating community service into school curriculums. But yesterday she was trying to integrate herself into the traffic in Germantown, where sharpshooters stationed on top of buildings and yellow police tape normally found at crime scenes usually meant presidents Clinton, Carter or Bush were in the area.

"Fluid and flexible," repeated Kinsley like a mantra.

It was a credo she developed in downtown Philadelphia early in the morning at the nerve center of the Corporation for National Service, which helped plan the summit along with the Points of Light Foundation. Kinsley, who serves on the national board of the government funded service organization, was trying to figure out logistics while talking about the educational concept she said was first developed by U.S. Rep. Richard Neal, D-Springfield.

"It's more than community service. It's more than earning a merit badge," she said, citing a Putnam Vocational High School project in which Springfield students worked with teachers to build a health center.

The project is among those featured nationally at the summit in a corporation brochure on public service.

Later, in Germantown, she pointed to examples of such service as she followed Fred Peters, director of the National Civilian Community Corps, to his charges.

Tamara Lehr, 23, was painting over graffiti on a closed storefront with Dieon Padgett, a 9-year-old from Germantown.

Lehr was a junior at Montana State University before she took a year off to join the program. Young people in the corps live at downsized military installations and do work in communities in exchange for a stipend and a college scholarship of just under \$5,000. "A goal of mine is to join the Peace Corps. I thought what better place to start than at home," said Lehr.

Former first lady Barbara Bush apparently had the same idea. Farther up the street, she joined her husband in painting over graffiti, stopping to chat with people like Kinsley. "Isn't she great," Kinsley said.

For Kinsley it was a moment to savor in a day which also saw protesters holding mini-summits of their own. Outside an opening rally at Marcus Foster Stadium in Germantown, groups like the Coalition of Students Against Servitude and welfare reform law opponents denounced the summit.

The call to arms to America's volunteers comes at a time when traditional entitlement programs for the disadvantaged are under assault. Nearly 2.8 million people have been removed from the welfare rolls nationwide since 1993, including those off the dole since reform measures that restrict eligibility and limit subsidies were signed into law.

"I have yet to meet the person that was willing to defend the status quo in welfare," said Neal, who met Kinsley and other Springfield delegates in downtown Philadelphia following the cleanup.

Neal, who voted for welfare reform, said the public assistance program needed revamping but may also need refinement.

"Volunteerism cannot replace the safety net but at the same time (the summit) is a worthwhile call to action," he said.

Springfield Health Commissioner Helen Caulton agreed, adding, "I'm very concerned about the cutbacks. The No. 1 health issue is poverty."

For Steve Clay, executive director of the Greater Springfield YMCA, the summit is about building a stronger partnership between government and volunteers.

"Some of the things that the country needs are too big for an all-volunteer effort," he said.

"The ultimate solution is a partnership."

The 10 Springfield delegates are among over 4,000 delegates and other representatives from 100 communities across America who have descended on Philadelphia. They will share their ideas for community improvement with delegates from eight other cities at working sessions today.

In a gathering that is a mix of both pageantry and purpose, delegates may get a chance to rub elbows with celebrities like Oprah Winfrey in between rolling up their sleeves for the complex task ahead.

There are those who fear that the true purpose of the summit - implementing five separate goals to improve the future for children over the next three years - may be minimized.

Clay said the test of its effectiveness will come when delegates return to their communities.

"My hope for this conference is that the follow-up will be there," he said.

For visitors to the city on the eve of the summit, the importance of the task could be seen at Thomas Paine Plaza. As a president prepared to issue a wake-up call to a nation, a homeless man slept in the shadow of a Jacques Lipchitz sculpture depicting a human pyramid of man helping man.

*Editor Marie Grady supervised the "Community Spirit" series in addition to other long-term, in-depth projects for the Union-News and Sunday Republican. This story first appeared on April 28, 1997.*