



Track and Field and Cross Country Gets Involved With NJIT's Exclusive Alternative to Spring Break Program

SHARE

Men's Cross Country | 3/21/2014 9:20:00 AM

TRACK AND FIELD AND CROSS COUNTRY GETS INVOLVED WITH NJIT'S EXCLUSIVE ALTERNATIVE TO SPRING BREAK PROGRAM

NEWARK, NJ—Less than 18 hours before they left NJIT for 8 days of training and competition, 25 members of the NJIT Men's and Women's Cross Country/Track & Field team began their spring break as part of NJIT's exclusive Alternative to Spring Break Program.

With two major events needing volunteers the morning of Saturday March 15, the team decided to split and provide as much support as possible. Coach [Al Alonso](#) and five athletes opted for the early morning rebuilding of sand dunes at Island Beach State Park trip which already had some NJIT students signed up but needed a leader and some additional volunteers.

"This trip entailed planting several staggered rows of plants [18 inches apart] to help defend against storms and erosion, something much needed after Sandy" according to Coach Alonso. The team joined by other volunteers, members of Jersey Cares and park officials proceeded to plant 1500 plants on a strip of the park designated for improvements. The goal for that day was reached ahead of schedule and ended with an explanation of its importance and a thank you from the lead park ranger.

Assistant Coach [John Crawford](#) and his crew of 17 Highlanders journeyed 50 miles south of Newark. Their destination was a small working farm in Red Bank, NJ that is focused on pursuing the inclusion of autistic adults into their own local communities.

So often we see and read about autistic children, yet little is seen that reveals the life of autistic adults in their own communities. Building on that thought, Impact Oasis' (<http://www.impactoasis.com>) mission statement is prefaced with the words "... because children with autism grow up..." At Impact Oasis, autistic adults live and work side-by-side with non-autistic adults through all facets of this small working farm.

On a daily basis, they are feeding animals, cleaning animal's pens, and harvesting food. Chickens, goats, and horses currently populate large areas of the farm. Additionally, Impact Oasis is in the process of building a new large greenhouse to improve the farm's food production. Later this week, another group of NJIT students will extend the Alternative to Spring Break week at Impact Oasis with the building of a small bridge to gain walking access to additional acreage on the property.

The NJIT men's and women's track team's task on this Saturday morning was to clear the farm of all debris littering the property. The task this spring was especially daunting following this winter's particularly hard hit to trees and shrubs on the farm. All the debris was hand carried over a quarter mile to the main county road at the front entrance to the farm. After hours of cutting, pulling, raking, and carrying, the long line of four-foot high piles along the roadside were large enough to fill about a thirty cubic foot dumpster.

Moreover, a number of the NJIT athletes interacted with adult autistic members of the farm and shared the following takeaways from their time at Impact Oasis:

"Even though they were seemingly remote and desolate, they were very connected to their land as well each other."

[Gursimran Singh](#), Freshman, Belleville, NJ

"Helping out at Impact Oasis was a wonderful experience. We were given the opportunity to assist a program that gives autistic young adults the means to gain their independence through horticulture and agriculture. It was an excellent day spent helping the community, and I hope to return soon."

[Kyle O'Brien](#), Senior, Whippany Park, NJ

Barb Augusta, the director of the Impact Oasis farm, wrote the following words after our departure, "The amount of work your team did today was awesome. It would have taken us until May to finish what your team did in one day. We are so grateful."

Courtesy NJIT Track & Field and Cross Country Programs



