

# Ranger Jeffrey Mouton

## Maryland Conservation Corps Supervisor

By Kristin Marucci

DNR's *Employee of the Year Award* is a big achievement as each spring, co-workers choose who among their peers demonstrates the highest values of the agency. None could hold that title with more humility than Jeffrey Mouton, a ranger at Patapsco Valley State Park.

After graduating from Frostburg State University with a degree in business administration and finance, and spending some time working for a large telecommunications company, Jeff set his sights on a decidedly different career path. Following a 3-year stint working at Sandy Point State Park, in 2009 Jeff applied for a position as a park ranger.

Today, Jeff is a supervisor for the Maryland Conservation Corps (MCC), a 10-month AmeriCorps program for six young adults. In addition to park maintenance and construction projects, MCC teams conduct interpretive programs such as Scales and Tales — an educational presentation that gives visitors an up-close look at native wildlife.

Jeff works directly with MCC team members, creating projects and supplying them with the tools and skills necessary to complete those tasks. He also makes sure to stress safety as well as teamwork.

"They come from all over the U.S. and from a wide variety of backgrounds," he says. "My favorite part about this job is working with such a diverse group of people. They all bring so much knowledge and passion; I just try to help them develop the skills to go with it," Jeff says. "We really want them to succeed."

For the past four years, Jeff has also helped with the Conservation Jobs Corps (CJC), a 6-week summer employment

program that brings urban youth into the park. Since 2010, 100 CJC youths have been in his charge at Patapsco. Participants complete a wide variety of tasks, including trail maintenance, planting trees, building rain gardens, constructing retaining walls, painting, building natural play spaces and adding rain barrels.

"The CJC program is a real summer job for these kids," Jeff says. "They have to get up and come to work each day and are paid for the amazing work that they do. They are also able to experience — some for the first time — hiking, camping and just being outdoors."

Jeff's outstanding leadership in these programs was commended by his own MCC group when they wrote a letter nominating him for 2011 DNR Employee of the Year.

"It took me completely by surprise," Jeff says. "It was just an honor to be nominated, let alone to be given the award."

In his spare time, Jeff's other passion is baseball. He helped establish the DC Elite Giants, a non-profit inner-city league and often picks up players on his way to practice.

"These kids come from a wide mix of backgrounds as well," he says. "Some go to private schools, others go to public schools and many come from single-parent homes."

Somehow, Jeff also finds time to work as a substitute teacher and help



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with an after-school program at a local elementary school.

Whether greeting park visitors, leading his MCC or CJC crews, or teaching kids to play baseball, Jeff's commitment to helping people is unequalled.

"Being a ranger means that every day will be different," Jeff says. "That's part of the challenge and part of what makes my job great."

**Kristin Marucci** was a summer 2012 intern with DNR's Office of Communications.