

LYNN NEIGHBORS

Home away from home

Americorps volunteer to spend 10 months in Lynn

By **ROBIN CONNOLLY**
THE DAILY ITEM

David Hankerson is looking for his world. Lynn (as of three weeks ago) is on the map.

Hankerson, an AmeriCorps volunteer from Atlanta working with Andrew Street's Social Capital Inc., has been in every state along the East coast. It's a journey, the 20-year-old says, inspired by mom, Pansy Walker; the one who "always says, 'go see it, find it' to know if it's where you want to be."

"I traveled before," the New York native who moved to the Georgia when he was seven, says, "but this time, when I found AmeriCorps, it was perfect timing. It was it like fell into my lap."

It's a fall, the candid top student, who admits to falling prey to freshman freedom of first year college, losing scholarships and facing hard facts, says, that brought him north. "Oh, believe me," the already registered voter, ready for Nov. 6 and excited about his first presidential pledge says of his own culpability, "when you have it right there in your hand and you lose it, you learn. You learn, and I have learned."

A bonus learn, he says, in addition to the chance to voluntarily give almost a year to serving the people, is the decision to change majors. He leaves anthropology, and with input into SCT's website "a real connection to the community," turns to technical and contemporary community. "I really love it," the always technical student says. "I love the outreach, and the fact that we can inform people about events, about opportunities, and we can make it user friendly, with nothing in their way."

His way, he says, when his 10-month commitment to Lynn is over, is home — to college, Coco, his cat, friends, girlfriend, "oh, and my car".

"Where will I be in 10 years?" he echoes. "I don't know. I really don't know."

He knows it might be far from home, the newest resident of S. Common Street (with the 'nicest' landlady) says, but it will still include the calls for cooking advice regardless. "Oh, I do. I do," the loves-his-independence, but still hungry humanitarian admits. "I call my mother or I call my grandmother (Carola Grover) and ask, 'How do you do this?' and they tell me."

They tell the total traveler the same words he hears from New

York and older sister, Devan. "She's my support," he says, grinning at the mention of the Vassar graduate who "did what I'm doing a few years ago. She's been through it, the feelings, and she's the one who keeps me going."

He goes, he says, every day after a 10-minute walk, to work and friends who include director, Trang Le, and associate Crystal Johnson, the one "who helped me a lot when I first got here." He also finds a growing list of the "people who make the place," residents of Lynn. "That's the whole thing," the newest fan of downtown's Gula Gulu, the place where he "sits and listens to the music, drinks coffee" and meets people, says, "the people are the ones who make the place."

His place, after he adjusts to "that unbelievable accent," noting his first few days in Lynn and the inability to understand what "dollahs" were. "I really didn't," he says, grinning and sporting his own New York/Atlanta mixed dialect. "When the man asked me for 15 'dollahs', I had no clue, none."

The clues come now, he says, every day. "It's true," the West Georgia University student says. "Every day, I learn something new, even if it's just how to get around on the bus and the train. It's still something."

He's learned independence has its price, he admits, but also its benefits. He's learned Lynn is not Atlanta, but has its own charms. The young adult who describes his roots as New York and his style pure Atlanta has already learned about the Highlands, about North Shore Community's anti-violence program and the special programs that pop up in the city.

"Visit the Web site (www.sci-lynn.org)" he says, "and see the events, the blogs, the resources, everything that's there."

See, Pansy Walker's son urges, the world that's right at your fingertips. It may not be his world, the one in which a grandmother, worried that it "gets cold up there," sends thermals, but it's one viewed before deciding.

"I don't know," Lynn's AmeriCorps representative says of where in the world he'll be after college. "I guess it would have to be the west coast. That would make sense. Start again and see what's there."

To reach David Hankerson at Social Capital Inc., 52 Andrew St., Lynn, call 781-599-1269.



Americorps students Alex DeGenova, sitting, Jacob Fitzhugh, left and David Hankerson.

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ITEM PHOTO / JONATHAN M. WHITMORE

Women from the Zion Baptist Church sing during Women's Day Sunday.

Zion Baptist Church to celebrate women

By **ROBIN CONNOLLY**
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The lights are always on at Zion Baptist Church.

They're "hurts turned to halos, scars turned to stars," and, in the sisterhood that is Zion's annual Women's Day Celebration, they shine. Oh, they shine.

They glimmer in the fear turned to "found their way" hesitation of co-chairs, Stacey Bryant-Brown and Joann Thomas, to take the job of organizing this weekend's annual event. "We just didn't know," Bryant-Brown says to Zion's Pastor Rev. William C. Hill's assertion of their growth and that they "found it in New York."

It was, the two admit, inspiration found, not in a New York minute, but in an all-female, two-day discovery of women power and bonds they share. "It was there," they say. "It was there."

It's here, now, in the sparkle of a line of women, dressed in white/pink perfection, marching to the altar to avow their faith, singing sisterhood for some, standing silent for others. It's in the hurts/scars theme turned to halos

and stars as they affirm their faith and reflect on how they got here.

For Loretta Brinson, on the program committee, the lights she knows are the two children who grew with her in their neighborhood church. The 28-year Zion member remembers coming to "the church right around the corner" and finding family. "It really is," she says. "It is so much about family. You feel comfortable. You feel as though this is your place."

Dorothy Middleton knows the place, knows the light that's kept this mother of five here since 1932. She stands in a line of women, she knows, who have shared her journey, who, she says, have "held the faith" through trials, through hurts unimaginable and the scars that remain. For her, she says, the death of her husband, when she was 52, and her special needs son, at 27, in 1993 have been lightened by her faith in God, by "believing" in all that is Zion.

"The church is growing," Sister Middleton, deemed by Reverend Hill as a constant faith force in the community, says, "and that's a good thing. It takes time, but it's grow-

ing." It's growth, Reverend Hill says with a mission "where people of all cultures and ages are welcomed... supported in being transformed by God's word; encouraged to be followers of Jesus Christ; and where we embrace those within our walls and reach out to the global community and where love is put into action."

It is those actions, he adds, that are celebrated today in the women of Zion, the women, he says, who support the church programs, keep the strength in a sisterhood that does not bend. The line of almost 100 Zion women, listening to sermons by guests, Rev. Angela-Lee Farris of the Whole Armour International Church and Rev. Lorraine Thornhill, pastor of the First Holiness Church of the Apostolic Church, know the strength.

They know, each, the lights they've found here. They know the hurts that hang as halos as they prepare to celebrate. They're the lights of Zion Baptist, and they're on right now.

To reach the Zion Baptist Church, 4 Adams St., Ext., call 781-595-0840.