

BUSINESS

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WORKPLACE



MIKE KEPRA / The Chronicle

Coro fellow Armando Sanchez asked workers at Full Belly Farm about labor conditions during a field trip near the end of his program.

Leadership in a Hurry

Coro Foundation uses hands-on approach to give fellows experience in public service

By Jennie Yabroff
SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Imagine volunteering 60 hours a week on a campaign for a candidate you know nothing about. That's the challenge Coro Foundation fellow Krista Gettle faced when she worked on San Francisco District Attorney Terence Hallinan's re-election campaign.

As a Coro fellow, she realized it was her job to learn as much about Hallinan as she could, and fast.

Next month, Gettle and 11 other fellows will be the 57th group to graduate from the San Francisco leadership organization.

Founded in 1942 by two San Francisco businessmen, the nonprofit foundation was designed to better prepare leaders for the breadth of issues that affect public policy-makers.

Over the years, the program has produced leaders such as U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, several members of Congress, the current president of the American Civil Liberties Union and the present chief executive of the Bay Area chapter of the Red Cross.

Each year, Coro chooses 12 highly motivated fellows to learn about communities in the most hands-on way possible.

In many cases, fellows have worked a couple of years at a company or government agency and

INSIDE

► **On the Job:** Overseas travel can be risky business.

► **What They Make:** A look at salaries of academic statisticians at research institutions. **B3**



Coro fellow Krista Gettle (peeking around sign) worked 60 hours a week on District Attorney Terence Hallinan's re-election campaign.

KAT WADE / The Chronicle

► **CORO:** Page B3 Col. 1

Learning to Be a Leader

► CORO
From Page B1

are looking to expand their horizons. The program provides them the opportunity to sample many work experiences in the public and private sectors.

Gettle's trial by fire on the Hallinan campaign was the first of several "experiential internships" during her nine-month fellowship.

The core of Coro's philosophy is that learning comes from an immersion in challenging experiences.

For Gettle, that meant spending a month conducting an organizational analysis of NASA's operations at Moffett Field, another month studying labor at the Institute for the Future and another working with KCBS radio.

In addition, she spent time with the Hallinan campaign and studied organic farming and water issues during "Ag Week."

She describes the experience as an "intellectual hazing" that begins with the selection process. Candidates are put in groups of six and given 15 minutes to devise a solution to a hypothetical problem facing a community.

Then they hold a news conference to defend their decisions before a selection committee made up of community leaders.

The experience is a small sampling of what is to come. "If you enjoyed (that process) and got a charge out of it, then you knew you could handle Coro," Gettle said.

During the past five decades, Coro has expanded, establishing satellite centers in Los Angeles; St. Louis; Kansas City, Mo.; New York; and Pittsburgh. Each center except for Kansas City, which offers a number of programs but not the fellows program, accepts 12 fellows a year, for a national total of 60. The foundation is privately funded through donations and grants.

While Coro seeks diversity among its fellows, they all share drive, ambition and a deep sense of purpose.

The experience has opened the eyes and changed the attitudes of even the most focused fellows.

Take Josie Mooney, a teacher for the San Francisco Unified School District when she took up the Coro program in 1975.

She began the fellowship with the intent of returning to teaching. Instead, her Coro internship with a labor organizer sparked an interest



A gift of bouquets elicited smiles from Coro fellows (from left) Krista Gettle, Masum Momaya and Dian Ip at Full Belly Farm in Guinda (Yolo County).

in the labor movement.

She left teaching and today is president of the San Francisco Labor Council.

Mooney, who says she grew up in a conservative Midwestern community where no one talked about labor issues, was thrust by her Coro internship into a situation in which she wrote grievances, organized picket lines and staged actions against employers.

"I didn't know what I was doing, so I didn't know to be scared," she said.

At an action protesting Pacific Gas and Electric Co., Mooney realized this was what she wanted to do with her life.

Now she mentors Coro fellows and teaches them about labor issues. She said she still reaps the benefits of her experience through the network of past Coro fellows.

"I might be the opponent of many business leaders in San Francisco, but because of Coro I have access to them."

Coro staff and alumni agree that learning to work well with others is one of the program's biggest challenges.

The emphasis on process and decision by committee starts on Day One of the fellowship, when fellows are immediately assigned a city to study. By the end of the week, they are expected to give a presentation of the city's "logic" to a committee that includes the mayor and mem-

bers of the city council.

Executive Director Rozanne Junker calls the first day a blueprint for the weeks to come. "They have a week to look at the economic, religious, social, political and ethnic logic of their city and come up with a report," she said. "The rest of the nine months, they look at these sectors in a broader way."

For Gettle, the first day was daunting but exhilarating. "We met each other at 8:30 a.m., and by 10 a.m., we were on our way," she said.

Although most of the San Francisco fellows already lived in the Bay Area when they began the program, they sometimes seemed from different worlds philosophically because

"It changed my views about everything," he said. "I learned the way the world works."

"Everybody does learn to get along," Coro director Junker said. "It sounds sort of mushy to say, but they really do learn to care about the whole."

As well as learning to live with each other, fellows have to learn to live on a very tight budget. While tuition for the program is \$3,500 for most Coro centers, it's free for fellows at the San Francisco center.

Although fellows receive an \$8,000 stipend for the nine months, Junker admits that doesn't go far in the Bay Area. "The fellowship is definitely hard to live on," she said.

Gettle, who had an affordable apartment when she began the program, said other fellows had a hard time making ends meet. "Everyone was grateful for every free meal, every time an alum would take us to lunch," she said.

The financial sacrifice may seem even greater to potential applicants with the current high-paying job market. Junker said the economy, combined with a general disillusionment with the country's leadership, has resulted in 15 percent fewer applicants than in previous years.

But she is quick to add that Coro fellows are needed, especially in business, now more than ever. And while the quantity of applicants may have declined, the quality is better than ever, she said. "There are still people who care about more than themselves, (and) whose motivations are honorable," Junker said.

As Gettle said about this year's fellows, "we'll be extremely marketable after Coro, but we're not in this for the money. We all have a save-the-world complex."



Full Belly Farm partner Judith Redmond (wearing hat) led a group of Coro fellows on a tour of her organic operation.

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