

# Recent grad turned community leader

Zach Kopkin's work at the Jackson Center helps revitalize the Northside Community

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After graduating from Appalachian State University last summer, Zach Kopkin knew he wanted a job in community development.

While in school, Kopkin took service learning courses, participated in AmeriCorps VISTA and traveled to Uganda. But in August, his next step became clear – serving as the temporary coordinator for organizing and advocacy at the Marian Cheek Jackson Center on 512 W. Rosemary St.

“[The Jackson Center] is a place where ideas are really important,” Kopkin said. “I could just feel there was something a little bit different at the Jackson Center – being in the community and of the community. It was an exciting opportunity for me.”

According to its website, the mission of the Jackson Center is to honor and renew the Northside community – a primarily African-American neighborhood in Chapel Hill.

Kopkin said his position at the Jackson Center lasts one year and is sponsored by Campus Compact, a service-learning group that promotes community engagement in higher education.

“Being a part of [Campus Compact] was a really great opportunity,” Kopkin said. “I applied through them, but didn’t really know a lot about the Jackson Center. Campus Compact did an initial interview, paired me up with the Jackson Center, did another interview, and then I got the job.”

Kopkin said there is no typical day at the Jackson Center. One day he may assist with oral history archives or check volunteer schedules, while another day he may work on overarching issues such as home repair advocacy.

Kopkin said the best part of his job is getting to know people and engaging in progressive discussions.



**Zach Kopkin looks over the Northside News, a newsletter he publishes every month. Kopkin said he wants to improve the newsletter by receiving more input from members of the community. (Staff photo by Ben Coley)**

“It’s not so much work stuff,” Kopkin said. “It’s what’s really important to [the community] right now, and how can we move forward on this together. And then it’s trying to understand the ups and downs of this community and the people within it.”

Kopkin said the Northside News is one of his favorite projects. The newsletter is a monthly publication that tries to increase awareness of local history, community events and important meetings.

Keith Edwards – UNC-Chapel Hill’s first black female police officer – has assisted Kopkin with the newsletter. Edwards provides a column called “Ask Keith,” where she answers questions from the community.

Edwards is a lifelong resident of Northside and said that Kopkin is committed to helping the community.

“[Kopkin] really wants to learn from this community,” Edwards said. “He has crammed years and years of history in the short time that he’s been here because he is so interested in it, and he wants to know how he can make things better.”

Rachel Glasser works as the coordinator for youth leadership and education at the Jackson Center. She said Kopkin is easy to collaborate with because he is al-

ways enthusiastic.

“[Kopkin] really embraced the mission of the Jackson Center early,” Glasser said. “He’s been really committed to building and solidifying the program areas that he works in.”

Kopkin’s stint at the Jackson Center ends in early August. Before he leaves, Kopkin said he wants to improve the Northside News and continue the expansion of the volunteer program.

He said that he is currently applying to Appalachian State for a graduate program called Appalachian Studies. The program is a holistic study of the Appalachian region, which includes contemporary social issues such as mining, housing and land ownership.

Similar to his experience at the Jackson Center, Kopkin said this graduate program will serve as the next step toward his goal – working to improve the community.

“[Community development] requires a broad understanding,” Kopkin said. “You have to understand the housing situation, you have to understand jobs and you have to understand an individual’s history.”

“You can’t just jump in. You have to understand why those matter.”