



## James Choppi

James and his family, including five younger sisters, lived in the MidTown neighborhood before moving to Wisconsin. At age 11, James was severely injured in a traffic accident and spent six months in a coma. As a result, he experienced physical disabilities but became a stronger person, determined to succeed.

James was very active at Zion Lutheran Church and helped with ZION Development projects. The kids in the youth group loved and respected him because, according to a friend, "You could rely on him."

Tragically, James drowned in 1999 in a lake in Wisconsin at the age of 14. He was very special to us at ZION Development and would have been a great candidate for our youth leadership development program. To remember his leadership, we named the James Choppi Neighborhood Youth Leadership Program in his honor.

## 2008 Choppi Interns



Jaree Brown



Amanda Ponte



Judith Rinehart



Montrell Brackens



Kevin Vongsavath



Harlan Page

### OUR INTERNS TALK ABOUT...

**The Program:** "It was a lot of work and a lot of fun. I enjoyed working as part of a team!"  
– Jaree Brown

**The Team:** "Everyone had their own personality, and I really liked everyone!"  
– Montrell Brackens

**The Opportunity:** "The Choppi program gave me a clear view mentally and spiritually on what I want to do in life for the community and giving back to the community"  
– Harlan Page

Front: Choppi interns on a visit to Marquette University

## JAMES CHOPPI Neighborhood Youth Leadership Program



**ZION Development**

*Developing indigenous  
servant leaders*

## James Choppi Neighborhood Youth Leadership Program

ZION Development established the Choppi Program in 2001 to employ neighborhood youth and introduce them to the principles of Christian community development. The goal is to inspire young people to go to college and develop skills to bring back and share with their neighborhood.

With ZION's Project Development Director, college-age students are hired as a supervisors and a team of high-school students are employed as paid "Choppi interns." They work with and coordinate the many volunteer groups (most of which are church youth groups) that work on ZION Development projects each summer. The interns' main responsibility is to encourage volunteers, arrange for appropriate tools and ensure that work is being done safely

### Typical projects include:

- General neighborhood cleanup
- Landscaping, such as planting flowers, grading and seeding lawns and building retaining walls
- Demolition/removal of lath and plaster, old porches
- Removing deteriorated concrete slabs
- Cleaning gutters and tuckpointing brick
- Painting and hanging drywall
- Building wood storage lockers for residents
- Wrapping doors and windows with aluminum trim

Choppi interns typically work 20 to 25 hours weekly each summer. Self-motivated young people who follow directions well become excellent Choppi interns and realize great benefit from the experience.

Over the years, this program has instilled an understanding of community development principles that continues to grow. The ongoing generosity of our faithful donors makes the James Choppi Neighborhood Youth Leadership program possible. Please consider partnering with us in this important program. Visit our web site, [ziondevelopment.com](http://ziondevelopment.com), to contribute via Paypal, or mail your contribution to: ZION Development, P.O. Box 4387, Rockford, IL 61110-0887. If you have questions about this important program, please call us at 815-964-8280. We greatly appreciate your support and your prayers.



**Team ZION 2008:** (front) Interns Kevin Vongsavath, Jaree Brown and Amanda Ponte, (back) Harlan Page, Laura Burns (supervisor), Montrell Brackens, Judith Rinehart, and Jake Black (supervisor).

### THE CHOPPI PROGRAM

During the summer of 2008, Choppi interns worked on ZION Development construction projects in the MidTown neighborhood with leaders, staff members and work groups from around the country. They also learned principles of Christian community development.

### EDUCATION

A study of the book, *Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischmann, was designed to enhance the interns' reading skills and to learn principles of community, friendship and the challenges of urban life.

To encourage our Choppi interns to aspire to higher education, they took trips to tour Augustana College, Marquette University, Rockford College, SwedishAmerican School of Nursing and the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Trips to the Plumbers' and

Carpenters' union facilities exposed them to opportunities for careers in the skilled trades.

### COMMUNITY SERVICE

Choppi interns participated in the RAMP Wheel-a-thon, a walk/run to benefit this local charity promoting mobility. They also visited the Community Food Center in Milwaukee, the national headquarters and training facility of "Growing Power," an urban farm site employing teens through various service learning opportunities.

### TEAMBUILDING

A rock-climbing trip with the YMCA's Camp Winnebago to Devil's Lake State Park in Wisconsin introduced leadership skills and team-building concepts.

All trips were supervised by Choppi leaders Laura Burns and Jacob Black.



**ZION**  
Development

*ZION Development is a nonprofit Christian community development organization formed as the result of outreach programs at Zion Lutheran Church. Since 1982, ZION Development has invested more than \$22 million in housing and economic development projects benefiting thousands of people who live, work, worship and play in MidTown Rockford.*