Located on the coast of Northwest Michigan, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore has long been a favorite vacation spot for families throughout the state. The picturesque shoreline area, named “The Most Beautiful Place in America” by ABC’s Good Morning America in 2011, boasts many attractions including wineries, water-sports, shopping and camping. But last month, a group of young people made this familiar June pilgrimage with a different kind of summertime activity in mind: historic barn preservation.

Kevin Summers, of SEEDS Youth Conservation Corps, led a five-member crew on a project to rehabilitate the historic Goffar Barn within the Port Oneida Rural Historic District of the Lakeshore. The barn, which dates back to the 1870s, was in desperate need of repair, so SEEDS connected with craft expert Steve Stier of the Michigan Barn Preservation Network and the National Trust for Historic Preservation to realize Michigan’s first HOPE Crew project. The enthusiasm this youth corps brought to the job was instantly palpable.

“Steve was pretty excited to see young people who care about a historic barn – as excited as we were to be a part of HOPE Crew,” says Summers. “To have young people there is a really cool experience, and really energizes the whole group.”

Unlike many of the young people vacationing at Sleeping Bear Dunes, most of the corps members working on the project had never been to the lakeshore, despite living just a few miles away in nearby Traverse City. The opportunity to work on the Goffar Barn project also afforded these young people the opportunity to explore the area, both historically and aesthetically, for the very first time.

And, for most members of the corps, historic preservation was as new to them as the Lakeshore itself.

In addition to the job training and experience working with a preservation craft expert, being a part of the HOPE Crew program provided a great deal of value to corps members in terms of helping them feel a connection to something larger.

“Being connected to a national program for these guys was pretty important,” says Summers. “It gave us the ability to say it’s not just us here locally, but there are all these people who also think this is important work on a national level. When the National Trust is there, showing us that other people around the country are doing the same thing we are, it feels like it has real momentum and feels like we’re part of a movement. I think that really got them excited.”

For this group of young people with a passion for carpentry, and a newly discovered love for historic preservation, this hands-on experience rivaled any summer vacation enjoyed on the Michigan lakeshore this year.