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Pacifica celebrates Earth Day with town clean-up

By Jane Northrop | Pacifica Tribune Staff Writer

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Pacifica celebrated Earth Day with cleanups and town improvements going on everywhere, including just beyond the town borders -- catching litter at Mussel Rock and clearing vegetation from the area that will soon be Devil's Slide trails.

More than 7,000 participated in Earth Day cleanups last Saturday. Lynn Adams, president of the Pacifica Beach Coalition, started organizing it shortly after last year's Earth Day was over.

She arranged for every elementary and middle school student in Pacifica to attend an assembly about sharks. The fascinating program presented by shark researcher, David McGuire, explained the vulnerability of sharks.

"One hundred million sharks are harvested for shark fins. This is not sustainable," Adams said.

This year's theme "Take a Bite out of Litter" did exactly that. While the total counts of how much garbage was collected is still being tallied, more than 7,000 people worked in one way or another to beautify Pacifica this year. Some cleaned the beaches, others lifted up rocks to free stuck garbage. Businesses and school children signed up for neighborhood cleanups.

And the good news, according to Pacifica Beach Coalition member Helen Nicely, is that less garbage was collected this year. People are getting the message not to trash the neighborhood or litter the beach.

"At every clean up site in Pacifica on Earth Day, there was 50 percent reduction in the normal weight of trash collected. Even the usually heavy load at Mussel Rock, Daly City, was much lighter than usual. However, Daly City has many areas that are as blighted as Pacifica once used to be. In fact, the Saturday following Earth Day, Mussel Rock held its regular fourth Saturday clean up. The Church of Latter Day Saints provided 45 volunteers of all ages, who joined the loyal folk who always help out, who together collected more trash, that amounted to almost twice as much in volume and weight as collected from Mussel Rock on Earth Day. This is a result of more coming in with the tide as well as more from the litter dropped at the car park area."

Team Tribune picked up litter and weeded the Linda Mar Park and Ride. Lots of cigarette butts were found. Many scouting groups were involved in cleanups in areas from one side of Pacifica to the other. Brownies cleaned up the community center. Boy Scouts took on the high weeds at Rockaway.

A devoted group -- the Martinez family of Dig It Landscaping and the Moreneo family -- that has been picking up litter from Roberts Road for the last three years came again this year to do it again. They said they were finding lots of cigarette butts.

College students, members of Phi Beta Kappa, from all the nearby colleges, and a student who came all the way from Chico, collected 1,000 pounds of weeds at Rockaway Beach.



Adams led the Shark Hero Pledge to fellow PBC members and City Council members Karen Ervin and Mike O'Neill at the site of the Rockaway college students cleaning. That goes, "I pledge to conserve the natural resources of the earth and ocean, to learn more about sharks, pick up litter and reduce my use of plastics. I pledge to show respect for nature and all living things and to use my voice to speak up for the environment." At the festival where all the people participating in the cleanups were invited to attend, local non-profit and city groups manned booths to educate people about their services. The Beautify Pacifica committee seeks more people to join them. The Parks, Beaches and Recreation Department explained their programs. The 4-H Million Trees Project explained how they are engaging youth to plant trees around the world and here at home.

The Marine Mammal Center explained about its rehabilitation services. Sea Stewards volunteers explained their activism stopping Japanese whaling ships from capturing as many whales as possible.

Pacifica Mayor Len Stone opened the event, followed by State Assembly Member Kevin Mullin, who noted Pacifica's rich community involvement.

President of the San Mateo Board of Supervisors Don Horsley thanked Adams for all her hard work and said, "I'm amazed how this community has stayed together. The early predictions for this town were 90,000 people."

Adams offered up thanks of her own to the many who volunteered that day.

"It's amazing what you all did. Everyone called, some as late as yesterday, to see how they could help," she said.

San Francisco State professor and Pacifican Mike Vasey spoke of the many accomplishments of Pacifican Mitch Reid, who was being honored at Earth Day not only by the Pacifica Beach Coalition, but also the Pacifica Land Trust and the California State Senate, through State Senator Jerry Hill.

"Mitch went above and beyond the call of duty as a tunnel activist. There are species who owe their existence to his passion," he said, referring to Reid as the Tunnel Champion of Montara Mountain.

Besides his work advocating for the "peoples' tunnels," Vasey noted that the bridge that takes drivers to the north tunnels spans a California red-legged frog habitat.

The Pacifica Beach Coalition named Reid an Earth Hero for "the demonstrated commitment to protect Pacifica's natural landscape, for the understanding that our beaches, creeks, ocean, open space, neighborhoods and wildlife are subject to harm through litter pollution caused by human carelessness; for realizing these natural landscapes belong to all of us and that each of us must do our part to prevent pollution and protect our natural heritage."

Adams presented Reid with a proclamation of appreciation from State Senator Jerry Hill in recognition of the Pacifica Beach Coalition naming him an Earth Hero.

"Thank you for your tireless leadership and collaborative work for nearly 20 years on 'The People's Tunnels' project and passage of the 1996 Measure T to save Montara Mountain. The completion of the project represents an environmental success made possible by the grassroots effort of hundreds of volunteers from Pacifica, the coast and San Mateo County. I applaud your commitment and your efforts to make our community cleaner and greener," the proclamation said.

And finally he received a proclamation from the Pacifica Land Trust naming him Tunnel Champion of Montara Mountain, that read:

"For dedication above and beyond the call of duty,

For creativity that inspired our imaginations,

For persistence in digging for the truth about the tunnel alternative and for never giving up until the last bridge was built.

And finally, for the myriad of species and environmentally sensitive habitat that will forever owe their exuberance to his passion

And for the countless people who will enjoy the pleasure of their wild company and unparalleled vistas that accompany their visits to this sacred place."

Other Earth Heroes were named at the celebration -- all those individuals and organizations that every year bring all the necessary volunteers forward to clean up a piece of Pacifica.

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In his keynote address, McGuire told the audience how fond he has grown of sharks as part of his ocean conservation work.

He is conducting research about where sharks go, and he has become alarmed that sharks are losing a lot of their population to fishing.

"Some species are down to their last one percent of population," he said.

McGuire introduced Lincoln Shaw, a member of the Sea Stewards organization, who volunteered to spend 81 days at sea trying to disrupt a Japanese whaling fleet from catching whales. He held up a large fishing net that had caused at least one whale, and other marine mammals, to starve because they were stuck. Due to the whaling fleet being rammed by the Sea Shepherd, the catch this year was much reduced.

"They target 1,000 whales a year, but this year they only got 103," he said with a twinkle in his eye.

See next week's Tribune for more photos and reflections of Earth Day 2013.

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