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Pacifica cleans up, celebrates Earth Day

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POSTED: 05/06/2014 05:25:39 PM PDT |

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Imagine an Earth Day of Action in Pacifica where volunteers combed every street, creek and beach and found not a single piece of litter?

That's wishful thinking in 2014, but not far from the course set by the Pacifica Beach Coalition (PBC) and its thousands of volunteers. Individuals, families, businesses and students put in so many hours cleaning up year round, half the amount of trash was collected than when Pacifica's Earth Day of Action first began 10 years ago. That's big news, said Lynn Adams, president of PBC and Earth Day coordinator May 26.

Besides trash pick-up, Pacificans engaged in other long term projects that improved the city. On Linda Mar Beach, a lot of ice plant had grown all over the dune area. Those plants did not provide enough nutrients to maintain the snowy plovers. After a lot of weeding, native plants were re-planted there to provide a better habitat.

Some community groups that couldn't participate on Earth Day organized clean-ups in advance. Many adopted spots they will clean year after year. That's another reason volunteers collected less litter this Earth Day. Volunteers descended on every beach, street, school and even Pacifica Gardens to weed, pick up trash or do whatever was necessary to improve or beautify a part of Pacifica.

Good Shepherd Church confirmation class cleaned the trail between Linda Mar and Rockaway. A member of that class, Christina Conry, said, "You can make a difference. It's good to know you are helping the environment and giving back."

Local businesses participated in neighborhood cleanups. Starbucks and the Pacifica Tribune cleaned the Linda Mar Park and Ride.

At Sharp Park Beach, Ingrid B. Lacy Middle School students cleaning up the beach found small pieces of plastic and a lot of it, too. One of their collection bags weighed 58 pounds. It was full not only of plastic, but also fishing lines, nylon rope, balloons and tennis balls they had collected. They knew their work was making a difference and that was satisfying.

Student Analiese Lakey said, "It feels good to know we might be saving the earth."

IBL students do clean ups once a month at school and around the neighborhood, another reason less trash was picked up on Earth Day this year.

Families have been doing the same, regularly picking up a neighborhood to scour for litter. Mike Perez, Director of Pacifica's Parks, Beaches and Recreation, often volunteers with his family. They usually find a lot of cigarette butts in a Sharp Park neighborhood, he said. Another PBC volunteer, upset about always finding cigarette butts in the sand at Rockaway Beach, bought a planter and filled it with plants surrounded by sand. Given the option, people have been extinguishing their cigarettes in the planter, she said. Other volunteers are working on designs for containers for cigarette butt disposals. PBC member Mitch Reid created a prototype ashtray he made using 65 percent recycled material.

At the waste collection site, PBC volunteer Deidre Finnegan recorded the number of volunteers



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from sign-ups given her by the site captains. There was a record number of volunteers this year, more than 8500. Some were from out of town, the furthest distance travelled was from Philadelphia.

"People came from all over to help out," she said.

The clean-up was only part of the Earth Day story. Adams went to all the local schools with biologist Carleton Eyster to teach children about the snowy plover. The snowy plover visits Linda Mar Beach, where habitat protection measures have been put in place to help them.

"We want them to use their voices to help," Adams said.

When Eyster spoke at the Eco-Fest celebration after the cleanups, he encouraged all to share their discoveries about shorebirds and wildlife on a couple of websites set up to record their observations and confirm identifications with a scientist, if necessary. They are Ebird and the California Academy of Sciences citizen naturalist program.

Eyster's group, Point Blue Conservation Science, conducts research from Antarctica to the Farallon Islands. More than 30 years of data has been collected.

"The research proves you can have people and birds together on the beaches," he said. "I'm against fences, but it makes a difference for the snowy plover."

Planting native plant seedlings, as has been done at Linda Mar Beach, really does matter, also leashing dogs and watching out that garbage doesn't get to them, he said. He believes the birds will nest again at Linda Mar Beach.

"They are so patient and will try to nest in the most adverse conditions. It's difficult out there for them. Few of the young survive. They must watch out for predators. Wind is the other enemy. People walking around sometimes accidentally step on them or disturb their nests," he said.

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