



Repainting the gazebo at Henry Miller Park was one of the projects completed by volunteers for Love Gustine.

GUSTINE – An estimated 200 people took part in the first “Love Gustine” event held Saturday.

The energetic group of volunteers completed a variety of projects that morning, painting, cleaning and lending a helping hand to fellow community members.

The entire event was upbeat, with volunteers chipping in as they were able...and together they made a difference in their town.

“This is about showing pride in our community. It’s our city,” Gerald O’Rourke told Mattos Newspapers as he leaned over to collect another cigarette butt off Fifth Street.

He and his daughter, Deirdre O’Rourke, were part of the crew scouring the streets in and around downtown Gustine, picking up bits of trash they found along the way. They happily reported that for the most part the streets were clean but they did find numerous cigarette butts, ketchup packets, cups and straws which they collected and disposed of.

“Downtown isn’t just for the businesses and the city to care about,” Dierdre said, “This is our city and downtown is everyone’s downtown.”

Community pride and service to others was the common theme among the volunteers who generously gave of their time and talents that day.

More people showed up than organizers had expected, a welcomed surprise for everyone involved.

“We ran out of the 120 T-shirts and 150 name tags before we even got started,” organizer Peter Jalilie happily reported.

In addition to the people who signed in at the park, some people just showed up at the job sites and others joined in the effort as it was in progress, said Jalilie, who is pastor at the West Side Christian Center.

“It was amazing! What surprised me the most was how involved the kids were. They jumped right in and kept asking what could they do next,” he noted.

The morning was filled with that energy and excitement throughout, from project to project. Many volunteers had registered in advance for particular projects so knew what they would be doing. Others just came that day and joined in where needed.

The entire event was a success, the projects were completed and then some. “While we were painting the gazebo someone approached us about painting a worn hydrant at the fire station,” Jalilie said. Before long, a small crew was organized and they had it sanded, painted and the drainage rock reset. “That’s what these days are all about,” Jalilie expressed. “As long as the supplies are provided, we can get the labor to get the work done.”

Some of the projects of the day followed that idea. The city provided supplies for repainting the gazebo at Henry Miller Park. The school district provided supplies for painting the library at the old middle school campus. Coast to Coast Hardware donated the paint for the Welcome to Gustine sign at the corner of highways 140 and 33.

Other projects were service based and the community chipped in with support. Residents dropped off food for donation to the AGAPE food pantry, blankets and clothes for residents in need, donated blood at the BloodSource drive and dropped off e-waste items at the collection site downtown.

Volunteers wrote letters to soldiers that will be included in care packages sent to troops deployed overseas through Soldiers Far From Home in June.

Energetic car washing crews under the direction of WSCC youth directors Esther and Carlos Cantu washed over 30 vehicles for senior residents of Green Acres Mobile Park as a way of saying thank you for all of they have done for the community throughout the years. “Seniors have given so much during their lives. This was one way for us to give back to them and show our appreciation,” Jalilie said. The effort turned out to be a hit with the residents and volunteers alike.

“I really appreciate this,” Darlene McClure told Mattos Newspapers while she waited for her car to be dried. “I haven’t been able to wash my car for a while and this is really helpful to me.” Plus, she added, it gets the residents out of their homes so the social part is good, too!

Another similar project was the trip teenagers took to San Luis Care Center to visit with residents and share a smile with them. Sharon Bettencourt and Sheila Borrelli led the group with songs from the ‘40s and ‘50s and the teenagers joined right in and sang with the residents with compassion and enthusiasm, Jalilie reported.

The entire day was good, the organizer summed up.

People came together from organizations, churches, neighborhoods, clubs, to be a community and that is what the day was about. “I think they got the essence of what we were trying to achieve,” Jalilie concluded. “That sense of service to others.”

Love Gustine is about that, loving Gustine and lending a helping hand.

The group was asked to take on another project for the city which they are excited about tackling this summer. Over 40 volunteers signed up to help paint the pool house at Henry Miller Park. The city will supply the materials and Love Gustine will supply the labor.

“The plan is to continue building a partnership with the city and school district to come up with projects for the work day next spring,” Jalilie explained. For now, the pool house project will replace the fall work day scheduled by Love Modesto (after which the local program was modeled) for Sept. 29.

“With the OLM Celebration and all that goes on that time of year, we decided to make the pool house our project and organize for the next spring work day,” he explained. He also hopes to form an organizing committee comprised of representatives from local organizations, groups, and such to broaden the project list and interest of the community. There is no limit to the possibilities of projects that can stem from what was begun on Saturday, he concluded.

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