

News

SPREADING THE LOVE

MORE THAN 2,000 VOLUNTEERS DEDICATE THEIR DAY TO IMPROVING STOCKTON

By **Kevin Parrish**

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STOCKTON - A familiar cliché, "Many hands make light work," was never more true.

More than 2,000 volunteers Saturday spread across the length and breadth of Stockton to paint, plant, prune and pay particular attention to the city's needs.

Love Stockton, the 2012 incarnation of Serve Our Stockton, sent volunteers to the city's parks and schools, community centers and missions, nonprofit agencies and neighborhoods. In a four-hour blitz of activity, some volunteers spent their time with senior citizens and others wrote letters to Stockton's firefighters, police officers and schoolteachers.

At the end of the day, event organizer Anna Morgan, exhausted, said, "I'm always amazed at amount of people who care about Stockton. And they worked hard today and took care of things."

She and her husband, Bob, put together a list of projects, recruited project leaders and then worked at matching resources with outcomes.

"It's kind of nice to spend one whole day in community service," said Susan Sherman, a 60-year-old member of Church of the Presentation. "We're tired of complaining."

Sherman is a resource specialist at McKinley Elementary School.

She diligently worked alongside Ramona Jacobs and Patricia Freitas on the Davis Road side of Dentoni Park in north Stockton.

Their task: redo the park's aging sign.

They were stripping off old paint and smoothing out the weather-beaten wood. Before they left the deeply wooded park, filled with giant Valley oaks and evergreens, the sign would be repainted.

Others on Presentation's Love Stockton team were trimming low-hanging branches in every corner of the park.

Some were painting - the benches, the fire pit seats, the horseshoe pit, the picnic tables and nearby municipal storage buildings.

Dentoni was getting a Catholic makeover.

"We're all here to serve Stockton," said Scott Johnson, 61, who works for West Coast-based Wilbur-Ellis Co., a marketer and distributor of agriculture products.

He was proud of Presentation's participation Saturday - 50 volunteers at Dentoni and more than 100 others at four different sites, including three Stockton Unified school campuses.

"Some ladies were walking through the park a few minutes ago. They said, 'Thanks for doing this.' "

Seven miles away, at the corner of First and Sutter streets, two dozen teenagers and their pastor were shoveling dirt.

By mid-morning, the Quail Lakes Baptist Church GO team was sweating hard in a labor of love. Their job was to

level the ground surrounding a recently finished outdoor basketball court. A mound of dirt was being evenly distributed around the concrete.

"We need to make this slab safe," said Bob Margaron, the 53-year-old director of the Peniel Missions, Inc. "God loves the kids in south Stockton and wants the best for them."

The basketball court is part of a refurbished Peniel Neighborhood Center, an inner-city ministry for at-risk children. Margaron, also a Police Department chaplain, called the mission "a hidden gem in Stockton."

Sierra Middle School student Logan Stromer agreed.

"I've never been here before," said Stromer, wearing his white GO T-shirt and sweating after more than an hour of shoveling. "They've done a wonderful job here."

"Everyone talks about Stockton not being a great place. You can't say that if you don't do something about it."

He was working alongside Marc Maffucci, senior pastor of the large church on Quail Lakes Drive. He, too, was shoveling dirt in the middle of the teenagers.

"Today is a demonstration of the body of Christ in unity," said the 54-year-old Maffucci. "We are standing side by side with other churches. Stockton is better off because of the Christian congregations in this town."

Quail Lakes Baptist had nearly 200 volunteers engaged in various projects Saturday.

Involvement didn't end when Love Stockton volunteers quit working at the designated stopping point - noon.

Quail Lakes, which has designated the Peniel Mission as one of its outreach targets, will launch a "Blessing in a Backpack" project next year.

The idea is to give neighborhood schoolchildren, most of whom qualify for free or reduced lunches during the week, a backpack filled with food every Friday afternoon.

Weber Point Events Center got attention Saturday. So did Victory Park. And the McKinley Community Center, where the Police Department wants to start a youth-mentoring program.

Many hands prepared those places for the days ahead. And, in many ways, Love Stockton was a jumping-off point - and not a destination.

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