

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

---

Posted on Wed, Nov. 23, 2005

## Creek restoration moves to next phase

**Students and parents planted more than 300 native plants Nov. 17 as part of group effort**

By Nargis Nooristani  
STAFF WRITER

**MARTINEZ** - Cassie Fowler, 17, helped a John Swett Elementary School student scoop the last bits of dirt around a newly planted sage.

"We like getting dirty around here, right Max?" she said to the boy, who was looking at his mud-caked hands.

More than 300 native plants were sown into the soil around the restored portion of Alhambra Creek that backs Martinez Adult School on Nov. 17.

Eighteen students from the Environmental Studies Academy, an alternative high school on the Martinez Adult School campus where environmental issues are emphasized, dug their fingers into the soil on Community Planting Day, and also assisted more than a dozen elementary school, high school and parent volunteers.

The Alhambra Creek Restoration and Environmental Education Collaborative, a community effort pursuing creek renovations, along with support from the Muir Heritage Land Trust and Martinez Adult School, organized the day to replenish the creek's plant life after a three-year restoration project.

The academy, or ESA, works closely with the creek restoration collaborative, and the two groups even share the same coordinator, Rona Zollinger.

Fowler has been an ESA student for three years, and said there has been a definite change since the first stages of the project. ESA students have been the leading force behind the creek restoration project since day one.

"It's been a lot of work," she said. "(The creek) was really dirty and unhealthy and now it looks pretty."

Now with the restoration complete, students can focus on beautifying, starting with the planting, then moving on to irrigation and creating a trail.

On the radar for future projects are an outside classroom area, kiosk for information about the creek, and the transformation of a tree trunk embedded on the creek bank into a totem pole -- if a volunteer artist is found.

Funding of \$30,000 from Pacific Gas & Electric Co. for ongoing creek maintenance was issued via check by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation on the planting day.

Community organizations have pitched in a total of \$500,000 for the restoration project. Among the donors are California Coastal Conservancy, the city of Martinez, Shell Oil Co. and the Department of Water Resources, which contributed almost half the total amount.

"It's quite a collaboration," Zollinger said.

She said it's the effort and generosity of so many different groups that has transformed the creek into an enjoyable resource, rather than a nuisance.

"We're going to be finishing this area this year, and we'll be monitoring this area forever," Zollinger said about the adult school's backyard portion of the creek.

Martinez Adult School director Marshall Burgamy said the students on campus can finally reap the benefits of a serene creek, instead of fearing a flood every time the winter rains elevate the water levels.

Shawna Brazzell, 16, has been an ESA student for three months and hasn't witnessed the years of hard work that went into making the creek an asset for the school, but she has worked hard to help beautify the creek.

"I get a feeling of accomplishment and pride," she said. "I look around and think, 'I did this.'"

---

Reach Nargis Nooristani at 925-682-6440, ext. 29, or [nnooristani@cctimes.com](mailto:nnooristani@cctimes.com).

---

© 2005 ContraCostaTimes.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved.  
<http://www.contracostatimes.com>