



Austin Soden, 6, pushes a tire out of the Cotati streams of the Laguna de Santa Rosa, while his father Jim Soden brings a bucket filled with trash up the banks on Monday morning. (CHRISTOPHER CHUNG/THE PRESS DEMOCRAT)

A day of service

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THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Tuesday, January 20, 2009

They call themselves Cotati Creek Critters and on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, they too had a dream. As part of a national call to service by President-Elect Barack Obama and Michelle Obama, volunteers pitched in on Monday, picking up trash, preparing seedlings, weeding and helping to recycle materials.

The non-profit group has long envisioned a portion of the Cotati streams of the Laguna de Santa Rosa lined with shade trees. On the national day of service, they got a lot of help toward that goal.

“We had so many sign-ups we decided to have two sessions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. That’s a first for us,” Jenny Blaker, one of the organizers, said.

“It feels different today ... to know that we are part of thousands of people taking part in a national movement,” Blaker said.

For Sarah Hollingshead of Penngrove who brought her children Sallie, 9 and Aedan, 5, the dirtiest job proved the most fun. With five-gallon buckets and long picker-upper tools, they trudged down into the muck of the creek bed and collected empty bottles and beer cans.

The Hollingsheads said they have participated in beach and school clean-ups in the past, but made a special effort on Monday to find a service opportunity.

“Our president asked us to do something for our community today. That’s why we’re here,” Sarah Hollingshead said.

She compared Obama’s call to that of John F. Kennedy’s 1961 inaugural address when he challenged Americans to “ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country.”

“Obama’s saying it’s time to get off your butts and I agree.”

Several families with small children focused on trash removal. For 6-year-old Austin Soden of Rohnert Park, finding a soggy cigarette lighter was tantamount to unearthing buried treasure. Despite once dropping his grabber in the creek, he found numerous tennis balls and a tire.

Other service activities in Sonoma County included clean-ups along the Russian River, Piner Creek in Santa Rosa and at Art’s Park in Bodega. Volunteers at Kenwood Elementary spruced up the grounds by weeding, pruning and sweeping.

In Roseland, a clean-up swept through the neighborhood and included a canned food drive.