



# EARTH DAY OF ACTION & ECOFEST 2014



## Little things matter. They made a big difference.

By Alison Cagle  
SPECIAL TO THE  
PACIFICA TRIBUNE

It's a rite of passage when growing up in Pacifica: elementary school field trips to the beaches, cleaning up litter, recycling bottles, learning about the native plants and fish; the childlike thrill of having the biggest bag of litter, knowing how clean the sand will look when you're done.

As Cole Westbrook, teacher at Ingrid B. Lacy school, succinctly put it during an Action cleanup on the morning of Pacifica's Earth Day, "It's hard to get kids out here once they start growing up, to keep coming back [to clean up litter]. But it helps to have them do it early, when they can still get excited" about cleaning up our beautiful shores. Watching the intrepid volunteers from Ingrid B. Lacy, I felt pride, nostalgia... and concern. For Cole is right: it's been many a year since we Pacifica graduates went out to the beaches and restored our city's natural pride. That's why this year's Earth Day felt more important than ever. It was a chance to learn, with an adult's awareness, just how badly our hills, trails, and beaches need our help.

At this year's wildly successful Pacifica Earth Day Eco Fest, the Pacifica Beach Coalition rocked another great event of family fun and environmental education. The festival, in its 10<sup>th</sup> year, draws hundreds of people from the Bay Area, across the state and the country. Dozens of local organizations and businesses were represented, including the Pacifica Shorebird Alliance, the Marine Mammal Center, the Surfrider Foundation, the Pacifica Beach Coalition, the Pacifica Library Foundation, and Safeway.

Images of this year's Earth Day honoree, the snowy plover, adorned the cheeks and hands of every kid in sight. The face painting booth was popular. Crafts depicting the adorable, although endangered, little bird were all around. As a first time

attendee, it was a lot to take in, yet I was overjoyed by the free-flowing community spirit and support.

I was lucky enough to take part in a private tour of Earth Day Action cleanup sites before the festival, courtesy of the Pacifica Beach Coalition. The Coalition is an instrumental force for ecological protection and restoration in Pacifica. They coordinate thousands of volunteers to keep our native wildlife habitats free of litter, and work with the public and our local government to preserve and protect Pacifica's ecosystems. Lynn Adams, President of the Coalition and a force for Mother Nature herself, took us to various sites and gave us the lowdown on environmental pressures caused by careless behavior.

A 50-lb bag of litter at Sharp Park Beach, half full of cigarette butts, left us all speechless. You would be shocked to learn how much trash gets thrown onto or washes up on our beaches, trapping – and poisoning – our beloved fish, birds, and amphibians. The Ingrid B. Lacy volunteers collected oily nylon ropes, plastic straws, and insidious micro plastic, those tiny pieces of pink and baby blue you often see buried in the dirt, once part of some plastic-y whole.

Over 100 lbs of trash and recyclables, and over 1,000 nonnative plants, were processed by the hour with the efforts of a delightfully animated squad at the Sharp Park dump site, headed by Deirdre Finnegan, PBC dump site coordinator. Asked whether the litter crisis had diminished, Deirdre said that our city's habitats are much better than ever before, but

that micro plastic remains the most devious killer, being ingested by – you guessed it – the very fish we eat. Lynn summed it up well: "When people don't see it," referring to the presence of cigarette butts, "they don't add to it."

Students and community leaders spent hours that day weeding a 50sqft. section of land above the Rockaway switchback trail, better known to dog walkers as the zigzag to Linda Mar. It was that choked with invasive plants. Buckwheat, California poppy, yarrow, radish root, beach sage, coyote bush, even strawberries – these, Lynn explained, are desired native plants in Pacifica. The PBC is learning more and more about how to restore native species properly. "Never leave the earth with an open wound. After removing invasive plants replace them with native species when possible. Native grasses spend their energies in the root system, holding down the soil producing fewer seeds than non-native grasses. Native plants will thrive when the non-natives are removed. This is a more complex process than one might think," Lynn tells us, making an encompassing gesture toward the weed-choked hill.

"Do you see any litter around you?" Lynn asked us, which was met with a hearty, appreciative "NO!"

"This is not normal! These sites are usually covered with litter. As you walk around today, look down. Look around you. Someone was here bending over to pick up trash, and making it look like this."

Her words were effective, reminding us how unaware we can be neglecting the environment we claim to protect.

By noon, the festival site was packed with excited people. Little ones, teenagers, new parents, older folks, all came to hear the PBC and other organizations speak about their city's environment. Biologist Carleton Eyster, from PointBlue.org, educated the audience on the Snowy Plover's endangerment; Beth Terry, author of Plastic Free, gave surprising lessons on how to reduce your plastic waste to, an unbelievable single bag a year; and Pacifica's new Poet Laureate, Dorsetta Hale, read a moving poem dedicated to the snowy plover, and the sadness of its dwindling numbers

at Sharp Park. Sunset Ridge School was honored for an ongoing commitment to environmental education through action. These honorees were labeled "Earth Heroes" by Lynn, a well deserved title in my estimation. If you have never been to Pacifica's Eco Fest, I highly encourage you to attend next year, and participate in the Pacifica Beach Coalition's yearly events in the meantime. The Eco Fest is a fun educational opportunity, as I discovered while touring the booths and speaking to organizers, asking the same question: What are the most

public aware of the birds' habitat. Now, I've seen the snowy plover in the flesh, and if you've ever come across these tiny, fluffy, brittle birds, you'll immediately want to protect their homes. Pacifica is a city of dog lovers, and I know that we would intuitively leash our dogs if they happened to enter a signed area warning of snowy plover habitats. The recent implementation of parking meters in Linda Mar is part of an effort by the Shorebird Alliance and City Council to address the snowy plovers' endangered habitats on Linda Mar Beach.

Cole and Lynn offered this advice for local beach goers: "Just say no to the 'To Go' cup and containers. Ditch the plastic. Have them fill your own mug at McDonald's. All those cups are plastic lined. Plastic breaks up into smaller and smaller pieces that never go away. Avoid straws and plastic lids and at the very least, pick up every piece of your trash. You never know how you may be ingesting it later on."

For all the continued danger of litter, everyone I spoke with noted the incredible changes wrought by dedicated Pacificans over the last few years, who have turned their love and bragging rights of our beautiful beaches into proactive restoration and eco-mindedness. "Now we have so many watchdogs. I get emails from people every day who find trash on the streets while driving or walking, saying, 'Hey Lynn, did you know this was here?'"

"Things like this, they help us heal," she concluded, "They help us be closer to our environment."



Thank you Mazzetti's for the Earth Day cake

migrating to our beaches. California State Senator Jerry Hill spoke enthusiastically about Pacifica's unique beaches, and of last year's astonishing 8,500 volunteers. As he presented the PBC with the Senate Certificate of Recognition Award, Hill proclaimed, "These are the people who make it happen; these are the people we love in our community, who work with unflagging dedication." Mike Perez was honored for his adoption and participation

destructive impacts to the environment that we Pacificans can avoid? What do we need to know about our local ecosystems to help keep them healthy?

The answers I got were passionately expressed coupled with a sense of urgency.

At the Pacifica Shorebird Alliance booth I learned about the Alliance's lengthy battle to promote Snowy Plover awareness, and to implement simple measures to keep the



Rugger Artzoia, (seated center foreground) PBC's oldest volunteer at 94, and the oldest living New York Yankee



Pacifica Beach Coalition team leading the audience in the Earth Hero Pledge

Photos by Dave Rauenbuehler

# The magic of Earth Day

The wonders of nature inspire many of us to help preserve the planet. Lynn Adams was amazed when a pigeon flew past her with two peregrine falcons in hot pursuit. Peregrine falcons are the fastest bird, capable of speeds of more than 200 mph. Misha Flores marveled at a snail that had hitched a ride on her clean up bucket. We all have experiences inspiring us to join the Earth Day Clean Up each year. This year was special as it marked the 10th Anniversary of the event. We have come a long way since the first Earth Day of Action in Pacifica.

"Volunteers cleaned more than 60 locations and many of these locations stretched over a mile long. Several teams restored habitat and pulled non-native weeds, while several other groups gardened, including a neighborhood park where an oak tree sapling raised from an acorn was planted. It is really amazing how people will take time out of their day to work together for Earth Day and how much they achieve in just 2 hours."



A prototype of the cigarette filter dispenser designed and constructed by Mitch Reid.

Lynn Adams told us.

"San Pedro Creek is 100 times cleaner than it was 10 years ago!" Roger Macias added.

Terra Nova High School students are a big part of the cleaner creek. For Earth Day they cleaned four areas connected to the creek; the Creek Mouth by Linda Mar Beach, the flood plain by the Convalescent home, Park Mall, and the streets surrounding their school.

Starbucks and Safeway stores brought teams of 30 or more and cleaned Linda Mar shopping Center and the nearby streets as well as Linda Mar Beach. Ocean Yoga cleaned Oceana Blvd, Bookkeeping Plus, Seaview Tire, Save More Meats, Tams, You Name It, Columbos, Safeway, Manor Music, Coastside Critters stepped outside to help clean up their business areas – front and back.

Every school in the Pacifica School District conducted a pus cleanup, held a Snowy Plover assembly and engaged the students in additional Earth Day activities.

"EcoFest included 45 ecological booths providing information and activities for young and old about the western snowy plover, sharks, whales, cetaceans, turtles, frogs, snakes and more. There were awesome bands including 15-year old Hanna Carter, Groovy Judy and Wall of Blues. People danced

and had fun, met with old and new friends, visited the library foundation, Pacifica's Environmental Family, Recology booths and more," said PBC member Paula Teixeira.

The Western Snowy Plover was the Earth Hero this year. Margaret Goodale and Paul Donahue, from the Shorebird Alliance spoke to 4500 students about the wonders of the snowy plovers and how they need our help. Linda Mar State Beach was home to over 30 plovers not long ago. Their number was reduced to 19 last year, and 9 this year.

For Jim Fithian, 18 year veteran Linda Mar State Beach site captain, the day started at 6:15AM as his crew attempted to set up their cleanup site in heavy winds before helping with EcoFest. It looked like a beautiful day was in store as the clouds cleared and hopeful surfers shed down coats. Two volunteers were already there, since they caught some waves before the 9 AM cleanup.

Jim met Steve Brown, the great Pacifica videographer, who reported he was looking hard for plover in line with this year's tag line, 'Little Things Matter'. Volunteers showed up in numbers around 7AM and started out unphased by wind and cold. By 9AM there were close to 126 volunteers at Linda Mar State Beach. Heroes came in all forms- families, Terra Nova High School students, Taco Bell, Starbucks, Safeway

employees, peninsula high school students and those passers-by who just joined in. Some of our heroes, like Dimitri from Tennessee made 4 or 5 trips out and back. He won the award for grimmest trash including metal pieces, cans, bottles, and construction refuse straight from the creek, destined for harm to marine animals. Two hours of hard volunteer work yielded hundreds of pounds of trash and recycling from a beach that had just been cleaned top to bottom a few days earlier. Our great volunteers even helped load trash in a truck and helped us load our car at the end. Now on to EcoFest. All said they would be back for the next cleanup if they could, but definitely next Earth Day. "Great job, Linda Mar Beach Earth Day Heroes. You really made a difference," Jim Fithian declared.

The magic of Earth Day is everywhere in Pacifica. Groups, families, businesses, city workers, everyone working together to clean our streets, restore habitat and garden together in small or large teams. Where else does this happen? What if it happened everywhere? Yes, the magic of Earth Day can be a peregrine flying by you in a blur, or it can be a child teaching their parents about the snowy plover because of what they learned and experienced in school, or it can simply be an entire community stepping outside to save fish,



One could get a photo as the "Garbage Monster" at the Safeway booth



There were activities for toddlers too.

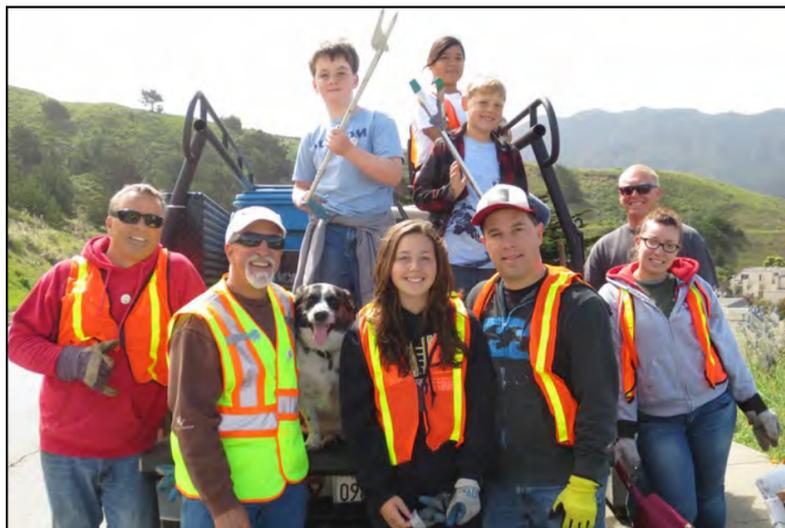
birds, and wildlife for one day. But the true magic of Earth Day may be that every day is Earth Day and as such, we all start doing more and more 'Little Things that Matter'.



The 2014 Good Shepherd confirmation class removing weeds above the Rockaway switchbacks.

*"In the face of the continued onslaught of litter, everyone I spoke with that day noted the incredible changes made by dedicated Pacificans over the last few years, who have turned their desire for a clean city into action and ecology awareness."*

- Alison Cagle



Dave Martinez and the Roberts Road crew

*"The bulk of us picked up trash on the level areas on the hillside that have turned into party spots. I was surprised to find so many large bottles of alcohol. But not surprised to find smoking pipes, lots of McDonalds cups, tops, bags and wrappers, and lots and lots of cigarette butts. We almost topped 1000 lbs. of recycle and garbage this year and that's without counting the mini refrigerator with the condiments still in it, binoculars, car tires and the lawn mower housing. I would especially like to mention and thank my wife Sharon and daughter Adriana for helping. They do the sorting, weighing and I couldn't do it without them."*

David Martinez - Roberts Road site captain



Resource Recovery Site collection team

*"Pacifica Playschool had a great time for their second year in a row participating in the Earth Day Clean Up!! We can't wait until next year!!"*

-Pacifica Playschool



Pauline Taini, PBC member and family at Sharp Park



Sunset Ridge second graders with their teacher and Margaret Goodale after sharing their tree planting project

# Pacifica schools celebrate Earth Week

Here is the story of one school. Earth week at Vallemar started on Monday with a school wide clean up. 132 students and teachers participated and cleaned up 7 pounds of garbage and 3 pounds of recycling, including a 2 pound plastic bucket that we can use for future clean ups. Everyone worked hard to come up with that much garbage as our campus was quite clean following a week off for spring break. Jacob



Snowy Plover cutouts with pledges for environmental action on the back were among student projects for Family Day on Tuesday of Earth Week.



Several projects designed to increase environmental issue awareness among the students were planned during Earth Week, April 21-25.

Meahan helped to weigh and dispose of our trash collection.

On Tuesday, presentations about the Snowy Plover and how we can all be Earth Heroes by Margaret Goodale and Lynn Adams were on the agenda at our weekly assemblies. The children were quite attentive and we all learned so much. The Vallemar School Leadership Class created the beautiful Snowy Plover banner featured center stage at the Earth Day EcoFest on 4/26.

The second clean up scheduled for Friday 4/25 was postponed due to rain. The rescheduled clean up took place the following Monday. We were curious to find out if having students back on campus for a week would result in an increase of garbage and, unfortunately, it did. Over 100 students and teachers picked up 11 pounds of garbage, 2 pounds of recycling, and about half a pound of compost. This time, I was helped with weighing and disposal by Maya Boysen and Andrew Webb.

The next day, over 600 Vallemar students participated in a Snowy Plover activity for Family Day. Teachers reminded students about the importance of Snowy Plovers to our ecosystem and then discussed "little things" they could do to help. Students decided what little thing they would do to make a difference and to help the environment. They cut out a Snowy Plover chick and wrote their pledge on the back. Then, they decorated the Plovers. Finally, they brought their Snowy Plovers home to share with their families.



Ocean Shore Students at the School Snowy Plover Assembly



The Vallemar School Snowy Plover banner had the honor of being hung center stage for the EcoFest celebration at Linda Mar beach on the PBC's Earth Day of Action. (Pictured here behind Groovy Judy preparing to perform.)



Margaret Goodale, here at the Vallemar School assembly, and Paul Donahue spoke to 4500 students about the Snowy Plover.

## Snowy Plover Hero Pledge

I pledge to conserve the natural resources of the Earth and Ocean, to learn more about Snowy Plovers, to pick up litter and reduce my use of plastics. I pledge to share the shore, control my dog, respect birds and their habitat and to use my voice to speak up for the environment.



Volunteers and students take the Earth Hero Pledge to help the Snowy Plover and the ocean.

"We had at least 60 students out there on Earth Day. I like the way our relationship with the PBC has become part of our school culture over the past 3 years. The Terra Nova site was cleaned up by a group of the nicest high school students and they did a fantastic job."

—Tom Whitaker



The Rockaway Beach team with their haul



Dierdre Finnegan, PBC dump site coordinator (c), with Matt Flick (l), and Chito Ordonez (r), from Public Works celebrating the volunteer work toward a clean city

"I just want to send out a gigantic "Thank You" for your time and energy at our Waste Collection Site. BEST YEAR YET! So many folks returned, bringing along friends and family. Some came from Redding, Sacramento and as far away as Philadelphia to be part of our Earth Day of Action. We even had a few newbies.

The positive energy each of you brought made me smile and proud to work with you. It is a not-so-glamorous part of our cleanups, dump site duty, but in my opinion, the most rewarding. Thank you again for being part of it in 2014 and I hope to see you throughout the year and back in 2015. It is never too early to start recruiting."

Deirdre Finnegan -  
Dump Site Team Manager

"The Earth Day cleanup at Mavericks was a real success! With the help of 32 amazing volunteers we collected 102 lbs. of trash, 11 lbs. of recyclables, a 110 lb. a toxic, treated wood beam and a full gallon of spoiled milk. I think I can speak for all of us and say that we all had fun and felt great about doing our good Samaritan thing."

Celine Gerakin -  
Half Moon Bay site captain



Celine Gerakin, Half Moon Bay site captain, at the Mavericks sign-up station

"A shout out to our amazing Cub Scout Pack 296. I told the scouts to come to the ocean because you care about it, want it to be clean, and let's have fun with it."

—Wallace Nichols



Syrena David (L) and Margo Meiman are the friendly faces at the Pacifica Beach Coalition booth

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