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Genentech Gives Back and volunteers take home a greater understanding of Pacifica beaches, ocean and snowy plover

By [Pacifica Tribune](#)

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"Work hard. Play hard. Give back" was the theme of the Genentech GIVES BACK week which the company celebrated recently. With a focus on Giving Back, 200 employees came to Pacifica to clean the beaches, restore habitat at Linda Mar State Beach, take in the great outdoors and learn! Life Technologies brought 100 volunteers to do the same.

The Pacifica Beach Coalition members hosted the volunteers and provided supplies, guidance, and education. Perhaps they even supplied a little inspiration.

PBC member Margo Meiman led a team to clean Sharp Park beach, promenade, pier and the surrounding streets and parking lots. She shared information about the endangered Guadeloupe Fur seal that was rescued near the pier with a balloon string around it's flipper and the flow of litter from the streets to the beaches.

At Linda Mar, Ana Garcia led a team to clean the beach and parking areas all the way south to the Pedro Point Shopping Center. A 15-year PBC veteran, she shared her expertise on Linda Mar State Beach and talked about the differences she sees now from when she started leading cleanups in 1997. "We have so many more people picking up every day now", she said, "and it has made a huge difference in the amount of trash we collect at our organized cleanups, but you can see how most of

what you found washed up from the ocean. After a rain event we will find two dozen tennis balls that came down San Pedro Creek and back up onto our beach. Or you will find hundreds of bottle caps, water bottles, plastic toys."

Lynn Adams led the cleanups at Rockaway and the San Pedro Creek watershed basin off of Peralta. At Rockaway volunteers cleaned both beaches, the walkway, all of the parking areas including Nick's, and the Rockaway business district. They experienced first hand the beach site in Pacifica with the most cigarette butts. What was the number one thing they found? Cigarette butts. And a new concern was discovered: the plastic wrap to toothpicks. Other notables included bottle caps, wrappers, plastic pieces, and two syringes with the needles still attached.

At San Pedro Creek some volunteers cleaned the roadside of Old San Pedro Road, the bike path to Highway 1, and the multiple trails to the creek while others worked to remove a horrid pile of rain soaked blankets, discarded clothes, and rubbish from a reported homeless camp. "It is sad to see this. Many of the items we pulled out of the heap were perfectly good and could have been washed or hung up to dry and reused again. Now it is all garbage," said one of the volunteers.

What other things were notable to the volunteers? "Straws, lots and lots of straws and drink lids," said one volunteer. "Cigarette butts and bottle caps," said another. "Small broken pieces of plastic wrap and plastic pieces" echoed a dozen or more volunteers. "Liquor bottles, lots of liquor bottles." Lynn Adams, held up one water bottle that was collected. It was tattered and fragile, breaking into smaller and smaller pieces as she touched it. "This is what happens to all plastic when it is in the sun and seawater. It photodegrades into smaller and smaller pieces. The Pacific Gyre is filled with plastic that has broken down and larger pieces of floating debris that has come from all over the world. And much of it is a pea soup of broken down plastic pieces that are ingested by marine life. Ninety percent of the debris in the Gyre has come from land, our streets. We have rivers of plastic

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flowing into the ocean and back to Pacifica's streets or on to the gyre. Only we can stop it," said Adams. "And that might be by using our voices as well as our pocketbooks."

Public works staff supported all of the cleanups as they always do by placing cones to reserve parking for the busses and picking up the garbage and greenwaste after the event. "Our public works staff has to be one of the best in the Bay Area," said Adams. "They are always there to help in whatever way is needed, even in this budget crunch time! And they do it happily."

Play hard? Yes, there was quite a bit of laughing and cheering and even a little bit of prize winning. The longest ice plant puller received a prize from the Pacifica Beach Coalition and plenty of pats on the back. Some Genentech departments joined together and signed up as a group. One group had members who met each other for the first time and will now seek each other out at the cafeteria line.

Picking up litter was only half of the service Genentech employees did to Give Back to Pacifica. All four groups reported to Linda Mar beach and pulled out thousands of pounds of iceplant to make way for more native plants. A large area just south of Taco Bell was cleared by one group while the other three groups worked on the north end of the beach. In a few short hours, 200 Genentech

volunteers had cleared a huge section of Linda Mar State beach of iceplant, giving the native plants there more room to grow. As the native species expand their territory and take hold, they will support more native wildlife like the Snowy Plover and other birds and insects who have evolved over millennia with them. Volunteers learned that a healthy stand of native habitat can provide up to four times more biomass of insects than a monogamous non-native patch like iceplant.

When all was done and the last volunteer photo was taken, Pacifica Beach Coalition volunteers including the site captains and assistants Steve, Tim, and Tom went home exhausted and happy knowing that help for Pacifica's beaches and our coastal habitat wasn't just two days of work by volunteers from across the peninsula.

Help for our beaches will be coming back to us every day now from San Jose, South San Francisco, Millbrae, Foster City, and every town that these volunteers reside.

One doesn't pick up hundreds of cigarette butts, bottle caps or plastic and not learn something. One doesn't smell the ocean, feel sweat on the brow, or hear about the plight of the Snowy Plover who needs native habitat to replenish their bodies to reproduce and not understand the power of native species.

One four-hour workday outside, away from work, can do that.

"Work hard. Play hard. Give back" is more than a motto, it is a way of living that many believe makes life meaningful. And giving back to Pacifica's beaches, hopefully gave back to the volunteers and in some small way refreshed a piece of their hearts and souls and left them with the knowledge of how to help Pacifica's beaches every day from afar.

The Pacifica Beach Coalition leaders certainly shared a hundred things they could do at home to help the ocean.

Hopefully their pledge to pick up litter everywhere, teach others what they have learned, and to think twice about the plastic they use will become a part of their everyday life.

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