

Over 530 participate in 'Love Ceres'

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Over 530 people turned Saturday to bust a sweat and lend some muscle during a community work day to improve life for many in the annual "Love Ceres" event.

The volunteers came from every walk of life to delve into 17 community service projects that ranged from pulling weeds to visiting residents of a local convalescent hospital.

"Overall we're very happy about how it went," said Becki Nicholes who helped organize the workday with husband Fire Chief Bryan Nicholes.

Eight Ceres firefighters and their children turned out to clear debris from the yard of the North Street duplex building that will soon serve as the Ceres center of the Children's Crisis Center of Stanislaus County.

One block to the north, members of the Mormon Healing Hands spent the morning clearing out the neglected lot at the corner of Magnolia and Sixth streets just north of the Clinton Whitmore Mansion. Neighbors reported that the lot had not been cleaned of the vegetation in 20 years.

Members of the Davis Guest Home Community Services team helped clean up areas of Ceres that have been trash and weed plagued. One of those areas was the alleyway between Grandview Avenue and the Hatch Road business district.

Frank Alvarez, the city's Code Enforcement Officer, took teams to clean up foreclosed properties on Ninth Street and Evalee Avenue and also helped a recently widowed Acorn Lane woman clean up her yard.

"It's not even the same house now, literally," said Becki. "The Home Depot crew brought in bark and flowers and added landscaping."

A crew from Home Depot on Hatch Road worked until 8 p.m. to repair a landing for a Las Casitas Mobilehome Park resident's mobilehome unit.

A 25-student work crew from Mae Hensley Junior High School leadership class and CJSF spent the morning spreading landscaping bark and planted flowers at the Ceres Unified School District headquarters on Lawrence Street.

"Last fall we had to move bark and the kids were exhausted," said Principal Carol Lubinsky. "But their comment is that it feels good to give back to the community."

The hungry crew was fed by members of the Ceres Rotary Club who barbecued a meal in the parking lot of the Ceres Community Center.

About 325 persons turned out for the 9 a.m. send-off at the Ceres Community Center. There Vice Mayor Ken Lane commended the crew of volunteer workers who suggested "When you get out there and see a neighbor, it's not so bad to give them a hug and tell them that you appreciate them ... let's love Ceres today."

Chance Condit of Ceres, representing state Assemblyman Adam Gray, spoke to the crowd, telling them that Ceres has never lost its tightknit community feel.

Councilman Bret Durossette publicly thanked the workers and took notice of how many young people turned out. He suggested each worker inviting five new people to return for the Sept. 28 Love Ceres event.

"This is good what we're doing today," said Pastor Mark Whitehead of Victory Assembly of God Church. "More cities need to do this. More cities need people like you who care enough to come out and make a difference. I believe that right now from Heaven God is smiling, saying 'This is what I'm talking about, let's make a difference.'"

In praying over the workers and their effect on Ceres, Whitehead prayed that God would "make Ceres a town that people want to move to and not from, Lord that you would restore unto us the greater days of Ceres from the past and show us that our best days are still to come."

The event featured an afternoon truck and motorcycle show staged by the Ceres-based Ballin' On a Budget truck club which collected a truckload of clothes for young people.

"It was great," said Becki Nicholes. "It's nice to see young people bring clothes and doing things for the community."

Bryan and his wife, Becki, attend Big Valley Grace Church in Modesto and learned about the Love Modesto event in 2011. The program was initiated in 2007 in response to Modesto appearing on national lists of the worst places to live and asking: "If all the churches in Modesto disappeared would anyone notice?" Several churches decided to get together and garner support for projects to "take care of things that fall through the cracks," said Nicholes.

Since the Nicholes's live in Ceres, they asked if the effort could be expanded for outlying cities like Ceres. The church decided to promote a Love Ceres event.

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