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Thousands of volunteers show they Love Modesto

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MODESTO --]

Saturday the love flowed — through arms wielding rakes, knees bent to pick up trash, feet bringing helpers to those in need, and heads bowed in prayer.

Love Modesto, where the movement started, drew about 4,000 volunteers pitching in on 60 projects to give neighborhoods some TLC, applaud heroes and help the homeless, organizer Jeff Pishney said.

Hoarse after a day of exhorting crowds and cheering people on, Pishney said he was reading the Love Modesto Facebook page entries from excited helpers and grateful helpees.

"When you start reading the stories, that's it," he said. "We have a great faith. We have so many amazing people in our city. It makes me proud."

The day began with a flash mob kicking off the downtown rally at 9 a.m. Volunteers got a chance to shake off the workaday dust with dancing-in-the-street energy.

Teams took off from there to tackle neglected neighbors and neighborhoods.

Nestled between the bus station and the taco trucks downtown, volunteers cooked breakfast burritos, laid out free clothes and bagged toiletries to give away. Customers arrived before the eggs were unpacked.

Also offering food and care to those living outside, Vine House at Martin Luther King Jr. Drive and Vine Street had games for kids, Christian films and free haircuts, said Paul Turner.

Josh Cummings helped organize a cookie bake-a-thon. About 140 people pledged to apron-up and bring two dozen cookies for first responders as a community thank you, Cummings said.

Sophomores Bik-Yelh Gao and Sierra Breaux put their artistic talents to work decorating pillow cases, a long-distance salute for soldiers serving overseas.

Crocheters looped and pulled for foster kids at Standiford Place retirement community.

Trashed riverbanks felt the love as well, with volunteers adding under-bridge areas along the Tuolumne River to the Love Modesto project list.

Jerry Johnson took the Love Modesto theme in a new direction, offering a two-hour orientation class for prospective foster and adoptive parents. "This is the first project that's a class," Johnson said, adding that 18 people had signed up to take it.

Community Hospice volunteers in bright blue shirts came out to weed, plant and beautify homes of current and past patients. More than 100 signed up to help — "and we're really overwhelmed by that," said Hospice staff member Amanda Hughes.

"I'm also impressed at how organizations are helping each other," she said, ticking off a list of community groups pitching in.

Business chief Rick Dahlseid said the Hospice project was inspired by an avid gardener who, as he weakened, found his neglected yard depressing. The team fanned out to serve nine homes, Dahlseid said. Adding poignancy to the task, the



ED CRISOSTOMO/ecrisostomo@modbee.com Philip Fuentes, 14, dressed as a Love Modesto mascot, and Laura Navarro, 13, leaves after the kickoff rally Love Modesto a community wide day of service on Saturday morning (04-27-13) in Modesto, CA. - The Modesto Bee - Ed Crisostomo

gardener's funeral also was Saturday.

"Our first thought is always the patient, but we realized the families need help, too. This is a way to reach out and take care of some of those normal domestic duties," Hughes said.

Other towns felt the Love as well:

- Love Turlock gathered volunteers at Columbia Park for dozens of civic projects and good deeds.
- Love Riverbank drew helpers. Projects there included weeding and laying bark walkways at a community garden.
- Love Ceres, celebrating its third event, had 535 sign-ups for 17 projects, organizer Becky Nicholes said as she checked off her to-do list early in the day.

A few feet away, Sandy Arellano was collecting her crew for cleanup duty at the Ceres civic center and central area alleyways. "We're going to try and do them all," she said, grinning. "We're going to go for it!"

Pastor Mark Whitehead of Ceres' Victory Assembly church led a Prayer Team. "We're going to go throughout the city praying, asking God for a stronger, better city," Whitehead said. His list of Scriptures sought blessing and prosperity for Ceres, guidance for city leaders and safety and protection for its citizens.

The Love is spreading. Brian and Debbie Anderson of Rancho Cordova attended the Love Modesto rally Saturday morning after hearing about the event at the How People Change conference at CrossPoint Community Church in Modesto.

"We were just thinking we could do something like this in Rancho Cordova," Brian Anderson said.

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