

## Merced day of volunteerism doubles the 'Love'

By Thaddeus Miller

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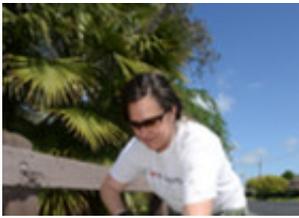
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Kaleen Vang, 10, and Pa Moua, 26, right, both of Merced, tidy up the grounds around Hoover Middle School, during the annual Love Merced city clean up event on Saturday (4-5-14).

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Love Merced, a day of community volunteerism, had its biggest turnout yet.

Roughly 1,300 people were involved in about 30 projects, including clean-ups and repairs, that went on throughout the city on Saturday. That's more than double the event's average of 600 volunteers.

One volunteer, Wanda Schindler, spent a few hours doing yard work at Hoover Middle School. The baseball fields there are used by both the school and city recreation leagues.

"I like to be represented by my community," the 52-year-old said. "I feel that it's important for us to be proud of where we live."

Other volunteers at the school cleaned the bathrooms and picked up trash. Many of them were members of Yosemite Church.

Diane Obrey, 60, of Merced came with that congregation. With schools and city services dealing with many

years of slumping budgets, she said, there is a need for a helping hand in Merced.

“We got out there and did what needed to be done,” Obrey said.

More and more people are hearing about Love Merced and understanding what it’s all about, said organizer Aubrey Nelson. That helped get businesses, churches, schools and other agencies to rally the 1,300 volunteers. “That’s an amazing amount of people,” she said.

There were a few realizations that helped push the number of volunteers way up. One, Nelson said, was that people are beginning to see that they don’t need to be a member of a church to volunteer.

Many people want to volunteer but aren’t sure how to go about it, Nelson said, and Love Merced is an easy way to funnel those good intentions.

North of Merced, Love Modesto drew an estimated 4,000 helpers to more than 60 projects, said organizer Jeff Pishney. Similar events drew several hundred volunteers in Atwater, Ceres, Delhi, Hughson, Oakdale, Patterson, Riverbank and Salida, he said.

The next Love Merced is planned for September. Organizers said photos and updates on coming events can be seen on Love Merced’s Facebook page.

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