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Earth Day 2011 Pacifica — sometimes it takes a village

By Jean Bartlett

Pacifica Tribune correspondent

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On April 22, 1970, 20 million Americans decided to place environmental concerns in the headlines by holding rallies for a healthy, sustainable environment. These peaceful rallies took place from coast-to-coast on streets, in schools, at parks, businesses and arenas. From these first voices for the Earth came the passage of the "Clean Air Act," the "Clean Water Act," and the "Endangered Species Act." This was the first Earth Day and now more than one billion people in over 192 countries participate annually in what has been called "the largest civic observance in the world." In Pacifica, Earth Day is celebrated with a participatory stewardship for the land, the sea and the sky that is extraordinary — extraordinary because of the profound cleanup results and extraordinary because of the great community of volunteers who come from all walks of life and in all age groups.



California Gray Whale (Photo by Izzy Szczepaniak)

Held on Saturday April 16, this year's Earth Day efforts in Pacifica are dedicated to the California Gray Whale. "Make a Whale of a Difference" reads the Pacifica Beach Coalition's Earth Day flyer.

"The event is planned for 10,000 volunteers," said Lynn Adams, president of the Pacifica Beach Coalition. "And over 6,000 students are expected to participate." "We have habitat restoration, tree planting, gardening, projects and planned cleanups at every beach and bluff in Pacifica," Adams continued. "And at streets, parks, creeks, open lots, throughout Pacifica and at a number of locations down the coast." Last year in Pacifica, 6,000 volunteers, which included over 100 community groups and 100 businesses, removed 11,000 pounds of debris.

The Pacifica Beach Coalition's website, www.pacificabeachcoalition.org, is loaded with information on how to participate in this day, which includes what to bring, what to wear, the location of the organized sites and how to sign up — and your help is needed.

"The Pacifica Beach Coalition is all about you," the website explains. "Together we represent a powerful force for positive change." Volunteer Rugger Ardizoia is 91 and he'll be out there on April 16, participating in his third Earth Day. His efforts to date have included counting trash bags for distribution to the different sites, counting "Earth Hero" buttons for the schools, counting and handing out pencils so volunteers can record their individual efforts, folding and placing letters in envelopes which he also labels that go out to businesses.

"I sit at the dumpster site at Cabrillo School and write down how much garbage and recycling comes in from each site and take down the total poundage," Ardizoia said. "I'm busy the entire time." "I recommend that everybody help out on Earth Day," Ardizoia continued. "We have had a beautiful group of volunteers, especially the young kids. And I'll tell you one thing, last year this guy and his kids were cleaning out this stream and they found a 100 bill." If you're wondering whether this "Ardizoia" is that famous guy with the minor league baseball career who also pitched for the New York Yankees in 1947 — he is! But Ardizoia pointed out, he is not the oldest volunteer. That honor belongs to volunteer Dante Santora.

"He's 95," Ardizoia pointed out. "I'm just a baby." One of the younger volunteers is Cabrillo 6th grader Sam Rickson. He, his parents and his siblings clean up Fassler Avenue, from top to bottom. Recently at the Pacifica Beach Coalition's 4th annual surf movie benefit (for Earth Day), Sam pointed out that included among the trash his family has picked up on Fassler was a Nintendo, run over a couple of times, with a game still inside. He couldn't believe it. He wondered — how could someone possibly throw away a game?

Pacifican Nancy Petty has been involved with Pacifica's Earth Day for the last four years and she has adopted San Pedro Creek.

"There was a time when people would dump all sorts of trash, unwanted furniture, old computers, tires, etc. at the creek," Petty said. "Because I live so close to it and I walk my dogs there I made it my purpose to clean up the area. I pick up trash, others' dog waste, bottles and cans. There have been homeless camps and the creek runs into the ocean and I wanted to keep it clean. It is a beautiful spot." Petty said since the road was paved and park benches and trash cans were added, the area improved tremendously and she finds it an extremely rewarding area to adopt.

"It's quite a lovely spot and a great place to walk," Petty said. "I love being in nature and keeping it the way nature intended is especially important to me. Every once in a while I get to see a Blue Heron and I like to hear the tree frogs!" Petty said there is definitely joy in Earth Day volunteerism.

"I have met some wonderful people who come out to help who I have never met before," Petty said. "They stay as long as they are needed and carry heavy objects long distances and out of the creek — getting muddy but they feel good about helping the earth. I especially remember a man who came out in his wheelchair and said he couldn't do much but

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he wanted to help. He used a reacher and picked up 169 cigarette butts! He brought tears to my eyes. Then there was a family of five with three young children who wanted to teach their children to help clean the earth. They spent the whole morning with us and their 8-year-old boy was so excited every time his bag was full of trash and recyclable items." Pacifican, author, marine biologist and Skyline biology professor Shari Bookstaff offered information on the California Gray Whale, the dedicatee of this year's Earth Day Efforts.

"The California Gray Whale is part of the suborder of cetaceans known as 'baleen whales,'" Bookstaff said. "Baleen whales have no teeth, but instead use fringes of keratin, the same thing your fingernails are made of, to filter organisms from the water. While most baleen whales filter the water for plankton or fish, gray whales are unique in that they filter mud from the bottom! A gray whale will suck up mud, then use its tongue to push the mud through its very coarse, rough baleen, capturing the organisms which have burrowed in the mud." "The Pacific Gray Whale is well known along the coast for its migratory behavior," Bookstaff continued. "During the summer months, gray whales are found in the Bering Sea and Chukchi Sea in Northern Alaska. In polar waters, sunlight around the clock during the summer months brings huge blooms of plankton and fish, thus providing a tremendous feeding ground for large numbers of whales. In the fall, as sunlight diminishes and the temperature decreases, gray whales begin their southern migration. Pregnant females lead the way down the western coast of North America, traveling in a predictable route that many whale-watching vessels and scientists take advantage of. The destination for these animals and those that follow is the warm, shallow, protected lagoons of Baja, Mexico." Bookstaff noted that the 12,000 mile roundtrip made the gray whale migration the longest annual migration for any mammal.

How does trash on land affect the gray whale?

"Gray whales are bottom feeders, and sift through mud for food. They have been known to consume garbage, which takes the place of food in their stomach. All marine life is greatly affected by garbage." (For more information, visit the American Cetacean Society at acsonline.org.) The Pacifica Pier is a great place to watch whales, the marine biologist said.

"I've actually walked out onto the pier and looked back toward shore at gray whales rolling around in the waves."

Pacifica Beach Coalition Earth Day 2011, dedicated to the California Gray Whale. Saturday, April 16. 9 a.m.-11:30 a.m. —Action. 11:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.—Celebration. Clean up sites include: Mussel Rock, Fassler Ave., Sharp Park, Rockaway, Linda Mar Beach, Manor Bluff, San Pedro Creek, Roberts Road — and the list goes on. Sign up at www.pacificabeachcoalition.org or call 650-359-5707. It takes a village.

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