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News

Wednesday, May 16, 2007



Fiona Day-Cofer and her daughter, Sarah Cofer don't mind getting a little muddy on Earth Day. The two were planting basket sedges along the banks of the Laguna de Santa Rosa in Cotati Saturday, April 22. The sedges were used by Native Americans to make baskets, and their exceptionally long roots help filter water and prevent soil erosion.
Franklin Lee

Earth Day really is every day for Cotati Creek Critters

By Nicolas Grizzle

The Cotati Creek Critters organization has been restoring the Cotati Creek area since 1999, but the group did not do anything special this year to celebrate Earth Day, which was Saturday, April 22.

The Critters just did what they often do, which is plant native trees and shrubs along the

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| AMEX | 2259.73 | 9.34 ▲ |
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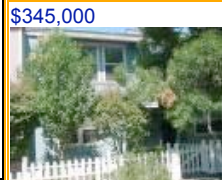
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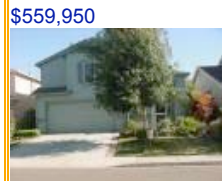
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mile-long stretch of the Laguna de Santa Rosa in Cotati.

Jenny Blaker, outreach coordinator and a founding member of the Cotati Creek Critters explained the lack of celebration. "At some point there had been discussions about the city doing a presentation on green building," she said, and the Critters did not want to take away from the potential crowd for that event.

"We decided that it would be good to fit in an extra planting day, and it happened to be Earth Day," said Blaker.

Cotati Creek is actually a small tributary to Cotati's section of the Laguna channel. "Most of the time when people refer to the creek, they're talking about the Laguna channel," said Blaker.

The Critters' goal is currently, "to plant 2,000 native trees and shrubs along a one-mile reach of the Laguna de Santa Rosa in Cotati by May 2007," according to their website, www.cotaticreekcritters.info.

Teaming up with the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation and the Sonoma County Water Agency, the Cotati Creek Critters have been awarded a grant of nearly \$170,000 from the State of California Department of Water Resources Urban Streams Restoration Program.

With this grant the Critters have expanded their monthly workdays along the Laguna into talks and Power Point presentations given to volunteer groups in the community. The grant "enabled us to step up our outreach program," said Blaker, and participation for the workdays jumped from about 10 volunteers each time to over 60 in December of last year.

Unfavorable weather has stalled their plans because they are unable to plant in wet or soggy conditions. Doing so might damage the natural habitat. Despite the recent lack of activity and the impromptu nature of the workday (it was only announced a month ago), still about 15 volunteers came out to Ladybug Lot in RP this Earth Day.

"We did a lot of work, it was a great day," said Blaker. The Critters planted 50 more trees and 186 other plants on Saturday.

The organization encourages volunteer participation, thrives on it, actually. The Critters have extended their planting days this year to May 13, due to rain, but normally plant from mid-October to mid-April.

Planting and maintaining local species of plants helps the Laguna flourish as a habitat for animals (including young salmon) and a drainage system during storms.

As the Web site points out, "A canopy of shade discourages non-native plants such as Himalayan Blackberry and grasses that slow storm water flows and trap debris. Shade also cools the water, reducing water temperatures and therefore bacteria levels. Cool water is also beneficial to native wildlife, and cooler water flowing from Cotati will help salmonids downstream in the system. Healthy creeks and trees help to make Cotati a more beautiful and enjoyable place to be, and improve our quality of life."

The group meets at Ladybug Lot on Lakewood Ave. in RP. The next workday is Saturday, April 29. Registration begins at 7:30 a.m. outside of 49er pet on Southwest Blvd. Lunches and Tee shirts are included.

The Critters didn't hold a big parade or Earth Day gala on Saturday. They didn't need to. The Cotati Creek Critters spread the Earth Day message year-round.

Upcoming events:

Saturday, April 29: The Critters will be joining forces with Rebuilding Rohnert Park-Cotati to do a weeding and mulching project along the bike path by the creek north of E. Cotati Avenue. Volunteers should register with Barbara Denlis of Rebuilding Rohnert Park-Cotati.

Monday, May 1: Thinking Inside the Box: The Fascinating Life of Cavity-Nesting Birds at 7 p.m. at the Cotati Community Center. Join naturalist and CCC Stewardship Coordinator Wade Belew for a presentation featuring his own photography and insights into the art and science of nest boxes.

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