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## Saturday at the Laguna with CCC



By Phebe Hong July 8, 2010 03:50 pm

On a bright, beautiful March morning, I attended my very first Creek Stewardship Day with the Cotati Creek Critters. At first, the idea of working with a group of strangers and my own lack of gardening experience made me nervous to join. However, my decision to volunteer that day is a decision I will never regret.

I found out about CCC through an article in the newspaper. After visiting their Web site, I decided it would be a great opportunity to gain some volunteer hours. After all, as a high school sophomore, there is a lot of pressure from colleges and parents to get out and serve the community. I figured volunteering to restore the upper reach of Laguna de Santa Rosa would look better on my college app than sitting around watching TV on a Saturday morning. Little did I know CCC had much more in store for me than just some "volunteer hours."

The day started out with a brief, informative demonstration by Wade (Belew) and Jenny (Blaker). To my surprise, the planting, weeding, and restoration involved in the process proved to be quite simple and straightforward, even for an amateur gardener like me. In fact, I learned many new weeding techniques I've later used to help my mom in our own backyard.

I also met a variety of interesting, friendly volunteers during the planting. There were people from all walks of life, including an energetic 7-year-old boy and a retired teacher. I struck up a conversation with a SSU student and we chatted about numerous topics ranging from environmental research to college parties. Through my social interaction with the other volunteers, I learned a lot more than just planting that day.

What surprised me most about my experience was the connection it had with my classroom. Though it was a Saturday (and thus a day I usually like to forget about school), I gained a whole new exciting perspective on environmental restoration I could relate to the ecology lectures in my AP Biology class.

In particular, I learned the crucial functions of a watershed and the importance of native grasses, among other things. Being physically outside in a natural setting brought the abstract lessons from my textbook out into the real world.

Finally, my day with the Cotati Creek Critters refreshed my appreciation for the outdoors. In a technological age, it is easy for high school students to get absorbed in a world of texting and Facebook. But out there, next to the Laguna de Santa Rosa, with the cool breeze brushing against my face and the gorgeous nature surrounding me, I really felt awake. I distinctly remember the hard-earned sweat felt especially amazing!

In the end, my involvement with Cotati Creek Critters turned out to be much more than a mere tally of community service hours. It became a rewarding, enriching experience that benefited me in many ways. I encourage all students to go out to a Creek Stewardship Day in the fall - you'll benefit from it immensely. I, for one, know I can't wait for the return of fall when I get to continue my great experiences with CCC.

*Cotati Creek Critters volunteers are people of all ages and backgrounds, including students from pre-school through university levels. Phebe Hong writes: "I am 16 years old and I attend Santa Rosa High School. Some other facts include: I play soccer, piano, and my favorite subject is biology." Above is her recent experience volunteering with the CCC.*

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