



Bayou Clean-Up is Kids' Concern

Eighteen youngsters ages 10 to 16 don rubber gloves and bright orange vests for their first hands-on day in the City of Pasadena's "Adopt a Waterway" program. Carrying large white garbage bags, they pick up all the trash they can reach on the slopes and near the water's edge of the quarter-mile stretch of bayou between South more and Thomas Streets. They try not to get their feet wet.

These kids, all part of the after-school program of North Pasadena Community Outreach (NPCO), are proud to be the very first group of volunteers to sign up for the "Adopt a Waterway" project, said Rick Bryant, Environmental Education Coordinator for Pasadena.

"We have more groups about to get assigned a stretch of waterway, but we're pleased these young people were the first. Before we got them out here, we gave them some training on water quality management, including testing the water—which will come later. First, we're having them clear visible refuse from the area."

The young people are well aware of the importance their activity holds for them and their community. "We need to keep our bayous clean for our children's children," said 10th-grader Ruben Santos. "Also, this bayou goes to the ship channel, so we have to keep it clean or a lot of fish will die."

This project isn't the only form of community service for the NPCO group. "Although we just recently began a focus on community service, we've already participated in a 'Bathe a Dog' day at a Pasadena animal shelter," said Roshand Miller, program director. "We want to get the kids involved in as much community service as possible, to instill in them the importance of giving back to our neighbors and society."

North Pasadena Community Outreach is supported in part by St. Luke's Episcopal Health Charities, the largest charity in the Houston area devoted solely to health, which in April of 2007 is celebrating its 10th anniversary. During its 10 years, The Charities has awarded \$66 million throughout 30 counties in the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. These programs have touched the lives of 10 million individuals, carrying out The Charities' mission to reach the medically underserved—body, mind and spirit.

"We wouldn't be here without St. Luke's Episcopal Health Charities," said Executive Director Steven Magellan. "The funding we received from the Charities has made it possible for us to gain additional funding. We have leveraged their gift and seen a return of \$1.50 for every Charity's dollar, helping us build partnerships that we otherwise would not have."

The comprehensive after-school program offered at NPCO gets in full swing at 3 p.m. and includes a daily substantial nutritional snack, homework help from youth leaders who are typically college students, and educational activities and recreation. Ms. Miller reports that student activities range from science to the arts and cooking.

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“Every week is a new surprise,” she said. “We’ve done frog dissection, built model cities, cooked a full meal, and given piano and guitar classes, to name a few activities. At the beginning of each week, I give the youth leaders a topic or theme for the week, and let them run with it.”

One youth leader was for years a student in the program. Abraham Martinez returned from college in Florida to live at home, save money, and attend college locally.

“I never thought I would work with kids,” said Martinez. “I came here for three years when I was junior-high age, and now it just feels like home. I have 16 kids in my group, and some still speak Spanish to me, but I say ‘Ask in English!’”

By 4:30 p.m. on their first bayou clean-up day, the eighteen young people are folding up their orange vests, disposing of their plastic bags of garbage, and eagerly awaiting the adventure of sampling and testing the water. But that’s another day.

To learn more about St. Luke’s Episcopal Health Charities, visit www.slehc.org.