

Dig Natives

Oak Planting

We had a memorial service in the Vista area last May," says Diane Nygaard, president of Preserve Calavera. "It was for one of the oak trees that had fallen over — one of the 200-year-olds. That's the generation we're concerned about. We're losing them in our riparian corridors."

Mourning dead trees is a poetic exercise. There's also physical work that needs to be done, and the four-year-old environmental group has committed itself to it. Volunteers were out a couple of weekends ago in Oceanside, planting

LOCAL EVENTS

60 new coast live oaks — *Quercus agrifolia*. They'll be planting more this

weekend in Vista, and everyone is welcome to join them.

Jerry Rockwell, a retired oil-company executive who is one of the group's most active members, says the seedlings to be planted are between 6 and 18 inches tall. "The height varies according to the individual tree. It depends on how the acorn sprouts, where it was situated in the pot." Each tree, all of which are being donated by RECON Native Plants, Inc., is one to one and a half years old at that point. "They're slow growers. There are a lot of other native plants that need to go into these disturbed areas, but these live oaks are the ones to go in first, because they take the longest to reach any sort of maturity."

The Oceanside planting took place at Oak Riparian Park on February 7; Vista's planting will be in Buena Vista Park. The politicians turned out in Oceanside, and so did the TV camera crews. Rockwell reports seeing "all the



Oceanside city council member Jack Feller (left) and Rocky Chavez (right) planting first oak

councilors and the manager, too." The most important municipal contribution in Oceanside came beforehand, when city workers augered holes with motorized posthole diggers. Bill Fortmueller, parks superintendent for Vista's Parks and Community Services department, says his workers will prep the Buena Vista Park area.

"We're going to mark the spots where the trees are going," Fortmueller says, "and then we'll use a gas-powered auger and pre-dig the holes. Right now the soil is pretty compacted and hard. The augers will loosen the soil but leave it in place. On the day of the event, the volunteers will dig out the soil and get the trees planted."

In Oceanside, says Rockwell, local students helped, too. "A lot of high school kids were there, and none were acting as if they'd been dragged there by their parents. One, named Julie, planted 13 or 14 trees by herself."

The work won't be over when the planting is, however. "Native plants like this need a lot of TLC for their first few years of life," says Nygaard. "Once they're well established, they don't need any care. They can live off our natural low water levels and in our native heavy soil. But until then, we're asking volunteers to adopt individual trees. They'll go out and hand-water them

every couple of weeks during dry periods. In some areas, where water is not easily accessible, we're going to have to fill gallon containers and hike it in." These adopters will also report on their tree's condition and replant, if necessary. "Our organization is prepared to take on the whole task, but the more people we have, of course, the easier it will be to do it."

In the end, what you get isn't just the isolated trees. Under the huge canopy of foliage that each one makes, a lot of other biological activity goes on. "An oak tree can have 130 different associated species," says Nygaard. "Some of these trees have a 90-foot-diameter drip line, so a whole host of plants, insects, and animals relies on the oak trees for life. They're critical to a healthy ecosystem."

Among the most threatened species that live in riparian corridors is the California gnatcatcher. According to the Preserve Calavera website, 85 percent of the bird's natural habitat, the Diegan coastal sage scrub, has been destroyed by development.

"We're starting with the oak trees," Nygaard adds, "and then we expect over time, when they're a little bit larger and wouldn't be shaded by other plants, that we'll plant some of the understory plants. We're working toward a long-

term effort to restore three of our key riparian areas, including the Buena Vista Creek Valley, Calavera Creek, and Agua Hedionda."

Nygaard suggests that volunteers who come out this weekend wear sturdy shoes, along with long-sleeved shirts and long pants if sensitivity to poison oak is a problem. They should also bring heavy work gloves and water, and, if on hand, a watering can or empty gallon water jugs, a small spade, trowel, and hammer.

Other materials were donated by Home Depot, apparently not one to hold a grudge against Nygaard, who wrote a letter to the city council last November stating reasons against building a new 149,000-square-foot store in south Vista, close to the Carlsbad border. The council okayed the construction, with 29 pages of conditions, on January 27.

— Jeanne Schinto

**Preserve Calavera:
Oak Tree Planting
Saturday, February 21
9:00 a.m.–12:00 noon
Buena Vista Park, Vista
Meet in the cleared area
by South Melrose at Green Oaks
Free
760-724-3887 or
www.preservecalavera.org**

Local Events
page 73

Classical Music
page 86

**Art Museums
& Galleries**
page 88

Theater
page 89

Pop Music
page 94

Restaurants
page 119

Movies
page 134

