



Churches serve the Peninsula for one Saturday

By Jeremiah Dobruck, Special to the News
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Part of the Peninsula got a facelift on May 1. Along Palos Verdes Drive North, between Hawthorne and Crenshaw boulevards, a few dozen volunteers from Palos Verdes Baptist Church painted more than 1,200 feet of fencing.

The congregants were taking the opportunity to work on a rare project in their own city, said Kaz Uemura, a Rancho Palos Verdes resident who helped lead the project.

"This particularly was a convenient project because it's right in our back yard. Our church is just down the street," said Uemura, motioning down Moccasin Lane.

They were teamed up with ShareFest Community Development Inc. as part of the nonprofit's seventh annual Workday.

For the past seven years, the Torrance-based organization has used volunteers from local churches and community organizations to take on service projects throughout the Los Angeles area on one day a year.

"Our goal is to have a practical impact on the areas we serve in one quick burst and pull in residents to connect with their own community," Chad Mayer, ShareFest's managing director, said. "It has an immediate effect, but it makes people eager to stay involved in their local school or neighborhood, too."

Just down the Hill in San Pedro, St. Peter's by the Sea Presbyterian Church congregants were painting and planting at two schools.

They created murals and cleaned at 15th Street Elementary School, and they worked with students to plant and weed at Angel's Gate High School. Not only that, volunteers from RPV-based St. Peter's will return to Angel's Gate on a regular basis to tutor students.

"Twelve to 15 people have already met with us, met with the teacher to see how they can help," Joan D'Amore, Angel's Gate principal, said. "That's probably the most exciting thing."

The approximately 100 congregants from St. Peter's and PV Baptist were a fraction of more than 5,000 volunteers across the South Bay and Harbor areas working on 335 projects.

ShareFest began in 2006 when a group of churches teamed up to complete as many service projects as they could in one day.

Since then, the organization grew to include youth services and completed increasingly large projects such as building a quad area from the ground up at Banning High School in Wilmington.

ShareFest became a full-fledged nonprofit in 2004, but it's also stayed true to its simple roots.

"Sometimes just the practical little things make a difference," Uemura said.

A year ago, PV Baptist helped tune up a school in Gardena, but since then, the church's leadership decided it was important to find needs in their own city.

“We actually had done ShareFest last year, and we went to another city to help. And we felt that there are always needs, but those needs might not always be known, so we deliberately wanted to find out if there was something we could do for the city, for the Peninsula,” Ken Tang-Quan, PV Baptist’s senior pastor, said.

This year they found a need a block away from their church.

“We want to be a church that is involved in our community,” Tang-Quan said.

Jeremiah Dobruck is a freelance writer.



Pictured, from left, are Dennis Fujita, Dave Akiyama, David Kuroda and Rick Kramer from the Palos Verdes Baptist Church. They recently teamed up with ShareFest Community Development Inc., a Torrance-based nonprofit that organizes service projects throughout the Los Angeles area, to paint more than 1,200 feet of fencing in Rolling Hills Estates.