

Skagit Valley Herald

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Cleaning up Kulshan

Residents, police team up on trash

04/28/02

JAMES GELUSO

Eight-year-old Candy Lopez reached down with a long stick, trying to hook a piece of plastic lying in the ditch. After a few thrusts, she managed to snag what turned out to be a plastic bag, and lifted it up to put in the trash bag she kept by her side.



Scott Terrell / Skagit Valley Herald

Meanwhile, her mother, Maria Galbez, was down in the ditch herself, grabbing garbage. And Candy's 3-year-old sister, Sandy, was busy trying to get someone to look at the "snake" — an earthworm — she had found on the trail.

The family was the first to get out Saturday morning for an annual cleanup in the Kulshan neighborhood. Residents and Mount Vernon police officers picked up trash along the city's hike and bike trail from 30th Street to LaVenture School. They also planted bushes and flowers near the police department's Kulshan neighborhood station.

The trail is flanked on both sides by wet ditches littered with cigarettes, beer cans, candy wrappers and worse. The amount of trash and difficulty reaching it without getting wet put Galbez, her children and three area teen-agers to the test.

The trail near Kulshan is always a battleground against graffiti and litter, said Mount Vernon Police Officer Greg Booth. The trail is the way home for many middle school students at LaVenture, and the bridge over Kulshan Creek has to be repainted regularly.

Booth pointed to one stretch of fence painted gray. The Boys and Girls Club painted it once a week, covering up the graffiti that



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appeared in what he called a "battle of wills."

"For about a year we haven't had a single lick of graffiti on it," he said. "So I guess we won. For now."

Booth spent most of his time at the neighborhood station Saturday morning, while the outreach coordinator, Elizabeth Ibañez, led the effort to pick up the trash.

Oscar Martinez, 14, said he would stay on the trail until all the trash was picked up — "Until 11 or 12," he said.

"Til 4!" Ibañez called from across the trail.

Close to 30th Street, the trash was mostly small, but as the crew approached 26th Street and the apartment complexes, the cleanup got more difficult. Pieces of furniture were sitting among the trees, where local kids use them as "forts," Booth said.

The "clubs" that operate in the forest are a reason kids need more to do in the area, said Ibañez.

Even with the Boys and Girls Club a short walk away, there's not enough places to play, she said.

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