

NEWS > EDUCATION

Sustainable Solano embraces Rocky Hill Trail



Sustainable Solano hosted a Community Day on the Rocky Hill Trail in Vacaville, discussing native plants and rainwater capture while also expressing the need for teen interns to help beautify the area. (Photo by Kimberly K. Fu, The Reporter)

By **KIMBERLY K. FU** | kfu@thereporter.com | Vacaville Reporter

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The Rocky Hill Trail, a popular shortcut between Markham Avenue and Rocky Hill Road in Vacaville, drew even more visitors Saturday as Benicia-based Sustainable Solano folks spoke of environmental issues and beautification efforts regarding the pathway.

A project by the Vacaville REACH Youth Coalition in partnership with the city of Vacaville, Solano County and Yolo Solano Air Resources Control Board, the paved footpath was dedicated on Dec. 22, 2016.



The Rocky Hill Trail in Vacaville, dedicated in December 2016, is an oft-used pathway that runs between Markham Avenue and Rocky Hill Road. (Photo by Kimberly K. Fu, The Reporter)

As late morning temperatures soared past 100 degrees, Sustainable Solano folks and a handful of attendees gathered to learn about native plants and rainwater capture, both potential solutions to environmental concerns.

Walking along the thoroughfare, which was flanked by patches of dirt and dry weeds, Intern Molly Skinner, 17, of Vacaville, pointed out the importance of native plants, especially those of the “bee and butterfly” variety.

“They are how California keeps itself balanced,” she explained, of the flora that attracts pollinators.

A research paper for a class at Vacaville High School inspired the senior to dig deeper and find “natural ways to fix our problems.”



“They taught me to leave things better than I found it,” she elaborated.

Molly said she's very science-inclined and enjoys Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) coursework. It's why she plans to study neuroscience.

“I want to be a doctor and I'd like to help people,” she explained.

Intern Madison Milar, 16, of Vacaville, meanwhile, gave a talk on water contamination and the basics of rainwater capture. The latter, she said, “can relieve the volume and velocity of storm water” while also helping to soften the ground.

Capturing rainwater can be as easy as installing a rainwater barrel under a gutter, she said, adding, “It's cost and space effective.”

Patrick Murphy, a program manager with Sustainable Solano, said the goals for the day were twofold — to discuss ways to make the trail more usable for residents and to engage youth in making that a reality.

“Our aim is to try to inspire our young people to come out and help with the project,” he said. “We want people to know we're trying to make the space useful. What does the community want? ... (And) provide a space that people can put their energy toward.”

Aside from the talks and the tour, putting together seed packets was an activity attendees enjoyed. Choosing from a variety of seeds available, people were able to personalize their souvenirs.

“None of these are invasive species,” Molly advised of the selection.

For teens interested in environmentalism, Sustainable Solano is offering an Environmental Justice Leadership Fellowship later this fall in Vacaville. High school students will study environmental and health information for the local community, discuss challenges and potential solutions, and participate in four hands-on workshops to help beautify the Rocky Hill Trail, officials have said.

Interns will also sow native plants and capture rainwater to mitigate some of those challenges.

The program is funded through the Environmental Justice Small Grants Program, administered by the California Environmental Protection Agency.

As the Fellowship will focus on the Rocky Hill Trail, Vacaville students will be prioritized. But, the program is open to all Solano County high school students.

The workshops will be in-person in Vacaville. Interns will receive a stipend upon completion of the program.



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Kimberly K. Fu is the News Editor/Assistant Editor/Public Safety Writer for The Reporter. With the paper since 1999, she has covered education, public safety, Vacaville/Dixon and the Solano County beats. She is a diehard fan of caffeine and the San Francisco 49ers.

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