

The Sacramento Bee » *By Cathy Locke | Friday, Feb. 24, 2012*

Weeklong work party beautifies Gardenland neighborhood

Sixteen-year-old Veronica Corona learned this week that if you have a dream, no matter how large or how small, you can make it a reality.

“Work hard on it,” she said, “and it will come true.”

For youths and their families living at the 124-unit River Garden Estates apartments in Sacramento’s Gardenland area and students and teachers from Sacramento Waldorf School in Fair Oaks, a week of vacation and unseasonably warm weather brought to fruition a project a year in the planning.

Since Monday, they have cleared weeds and debris and built paths to open up a new section of a community garden behind the apartments in the 2200 block of Northview Drive. They’ve also rebuilt and painted a fence at an apartment complex across the street, cleaned up a vacant lot and constructed a path to improve safety for residents traversing the area.

Along with the heavy lifting, they’ve led neighborhood children in playing games and making crafts.

Several organizations played a role in the undertaking inspired by Edgard Gouveia Jr., an architect and urban planner who founded the Brazil-based Oasis Games.

Gouveia, who has spent the week

assisting with the project, spoke to students at Sacramento Waldorf School last spring about the Oasis Games, which aim to involve people in community development projects by approaching the work as a game.

Working on projects in Brazil’s slums, Gouveia said he found that it often took three or four years to gain the confidence of people in the community before improvements could be undertaken.

A party, he discovered, was a far more effective way to get people involved.

“We invite people for play,” he said. “We invite the whole community.”

Participation in cooperative games and dancing help build and energize the community, he said, and that enthusiasm and community spirit carry into the work.

The Oasis Games approach has been employed in numerous countries. The motto, Gouveia said, is “Make it fast, make it free and make it fun.”

He likened this week’s project on Northview Drive to an old-fashioned barn-raising.

Students and teachers at Sacramento Waldorf School, inspired by Gouveia, went in search of a project. That led them to Kacie Stratton, executive director of The GreenHouse, an organization that offers an after-school program, men-

toring and leadership training for youngsters living on Northview Drive.

Stratton said she was drawn to the neighborhood by a story in The Bee that reported 567 children lived in that block at the time of the 2000 census.

Working with Stratton and Sacramento/Yolo Mutual Housing Association, which operates River Garden Estates, people with a desire to serve were matched with people looking to improve their community.

The two groups have worked together for months planning the projects. More than 200 volunteers from Sacramento and Bay Area Waldorf schools joined with more than 100 River Garden Estates residents to carry out the work this week.

In the process, they’ve built a relationship, said 17-year-old Rose Gray, a Sacramento Waldorf School student.

“It’s a friendship,” said Corona, a River Garden Estates resident.

Stratton said she expects that relationship to continue. A clubhouse at the complex needs to be rebuilt, and when it became apparent the work couldn’t be accomplished this week, the Waldorf group said not to worry.

“If we do it in December, that’s OK,” Stratton said. “They said, ‘We’ll be here.’”

