

New Laguna park serves as science lab

by Frank Robertson
Sonoma West Staff Writer

SEBASTOPOL — Several dozen Pine Crest School students looked glad to be cleaning concrete chunks out of the Laguna de Santa Rosa last week during a two-day watershed awareness project sponsored by AmeriCorps.

"We're going to do some service for our community," AmeriCorps guide Owen Rowe told a group as they donned gloves to prepare for the cleanup. "We're going to pick up concrete."

Pine Crest 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders also studied Laguna native trees, observed wildlife, and measured the temperature of the stream as part of the school science project, the first-ever held in the City's new Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetlands Preserve.

"Who can tell me what the oldest tree in the world is?" Erin Malik asked a dozen students seated in the shade of a streamside cottonwood. The first guesses were redwood and oak—close, but not the right answer.

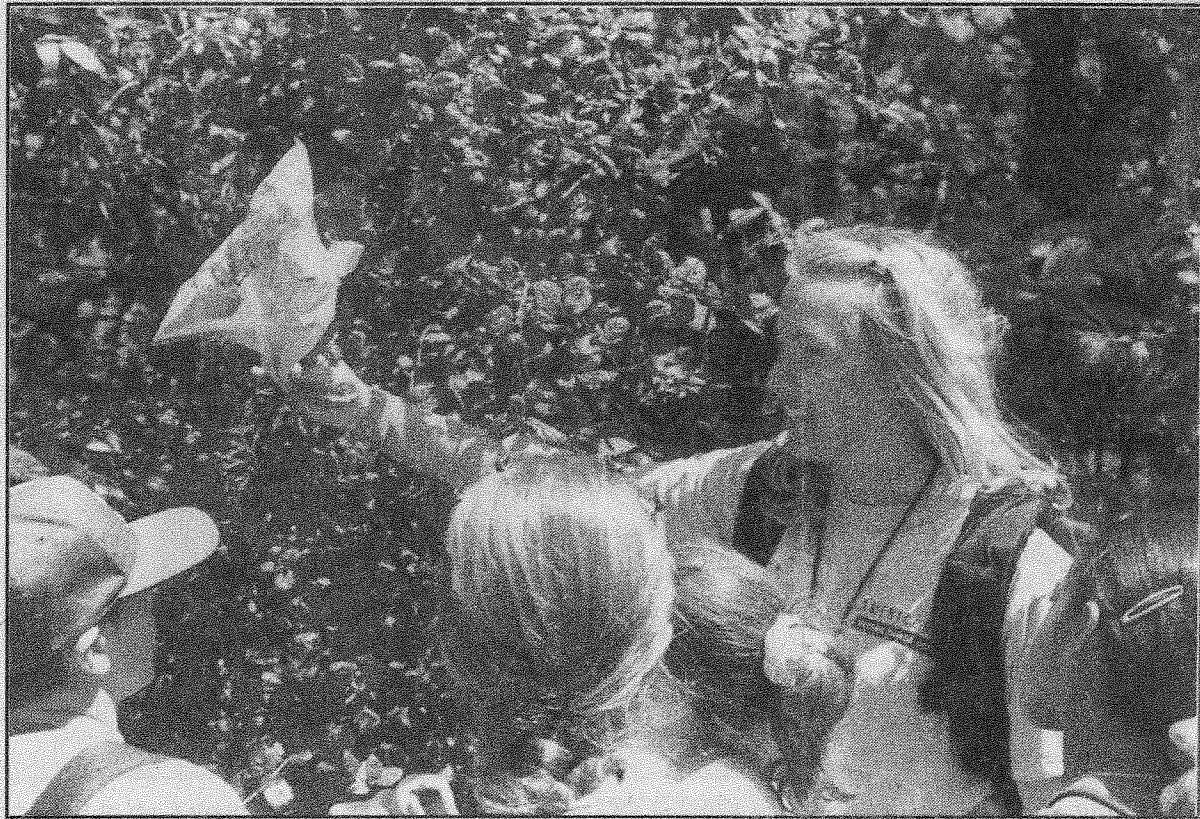
The oldest tree is the bristlecone pine, known to be 5,000 years old.

"They look like humongous pieces of driftwood," said Malik. "They're the oldest living things on the planet."

Malik, who is planning a career as a teacher, talked to the students about photosynthesis and the cooling power of nature trees.

"One big tree has the cooling power of about 100 air conditioners," said Malik.

The Laguna science lab project was the idea of Malik, Owen Rowe, and Heather



RIPARIAN WORKSHOP — Erin Malik of the AmeriCorps Watershed Project helped organize a creek-cleanup, native plant identification walk, and a water quality science lesson at Sebastopol's new Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetlands Preserve last Thursday and Friday. Pine Crest School 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders participated in the outdoor science lab that was held in conjunction with the Laguna in Balance observance last Sunday, May 2.

Jensen, all future teachers now serving in AmeriCorps, the national domestic Peace Corps project that focuses on environmental restoration and awareness.

The Pine Crest students hooked up with AmeriCorps after Malik, Rowe, and Jensen made a presentation to the school and offered to teach the two-day study of riparian habitat in the Russian river watershed.

Enthusiasm ran high among teachers and students, said Malik. "The kids wanted to come down here really bad."

The new Laguna preserve "is perfect as a science lab" to learn about habitat, said Malik. An estimated 350 Pine Crest students participated in the two-day project.

Focusing on the theme of environmental sustainability, the students also painted murals that were on display at the Sebastopol Community Center for last Sunday's Laguna in Balance festivities.

Malik, a former Pine Crest student who has gone on to college and has now returned here to take up a career as a schoolteacher, said she's

encouraged at the way environmental science is striking a chord with young students.

"They're really into it" said Malik last week as dozens of Pine Crest kids enjoyed the Laguna park's sunshine, abundant birdlife, open water, and new trails on land that less than a generation ago was associated with pollution, junk, and neglect.

When she was growing up in Sebastopol the Laguna was the place where "people dumped stuff," recalls Malik. In those days, "You just didn't go over there."