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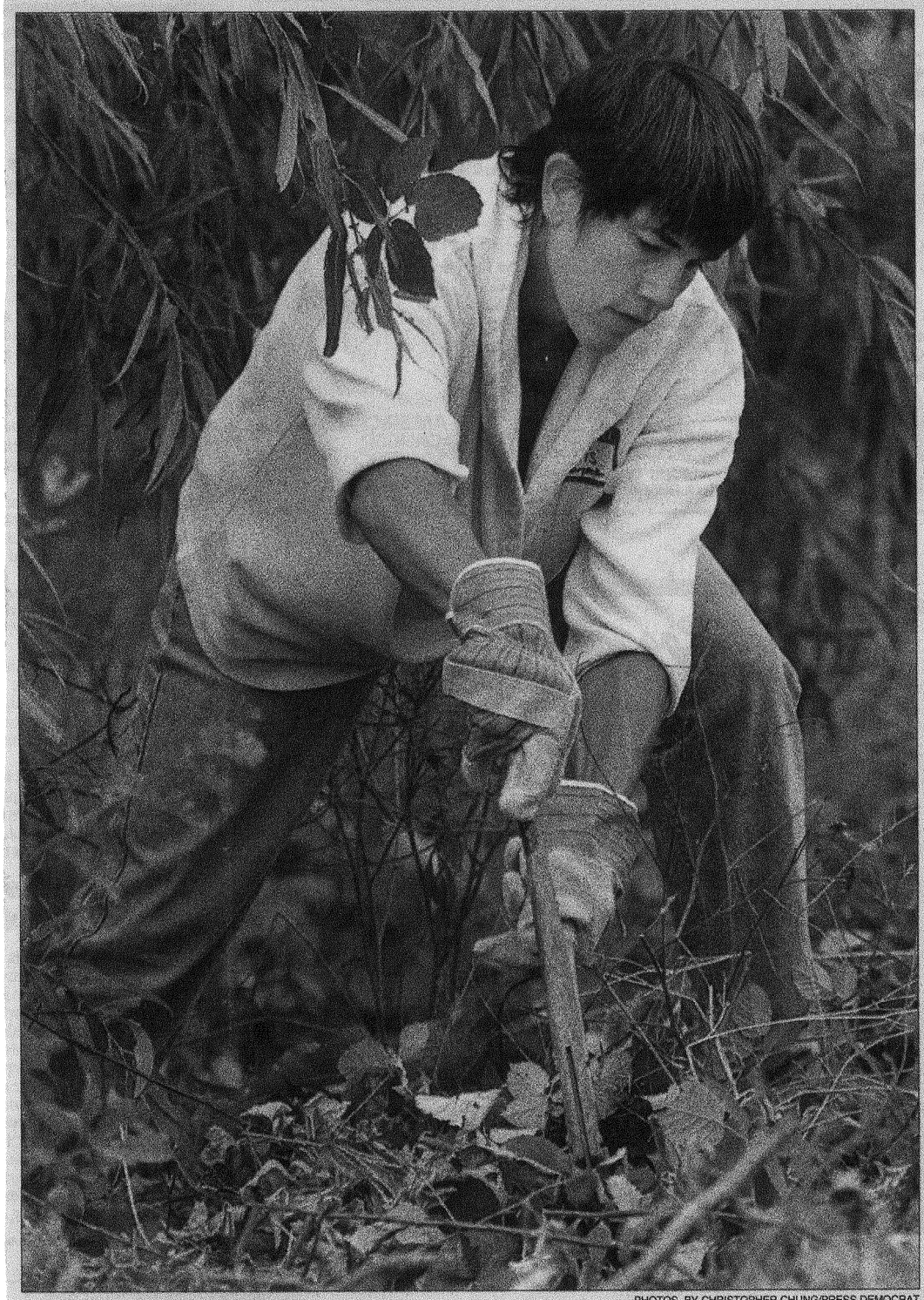

PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER CHUNG/PRESS DEMOCRAT

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'It's a challenge. You put a wildlife area near human activity and the wildlife will find wiggle room and do well."

CHRIS CARPENTER

Chris Carpenter cuts back blackberry bushes at the Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetlands Preserve during a work session over the Labor Day weekend.

With efforts by the city, the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation, private donations and years of volunteer work, the area is being transformed.

The city put in the trail that loops along the western edge of the Laguna, an entrance arbor and a handful of benches, and bought 1,000 new plants and trees. Earlier this year, the area was dedicated as the preserve.

But the city's limited staff and resources can't keep up with the needs of the area, Webster said.

"That's where the volunteers have been real helpful," he said. "They supplement our resources. It's been a big contribution."

The first Laguna work day was in May 1997, and since then, volunteers have come out at least once every two months, Carpenter said.

The biggest job was eliminating a veritable 12-foot wall of blackberries "and a mountain of trash," said Carpenter. Weeding, planting, watering, and trash and dog-poop patrol are all part of the routine care.

"The volunteers keep the wheels running," Carpenter said.

Like other volunteers, Bob Evans, a self-described historian, also professed a love for the area. That morning he was attacking the blackberries — a never-ending battle for volunteers who use muscle instead of poison to rid the area of the non-native bush.

"Each work party makes a big dent," Evans said.

Volunteer Deb Rudo enjoys evening strolls along the preserve, so was happy to join the effort.

"It's something so precious. I felt like I wanted to get involved," Rudo said. "This is the kind of program I could really get behind."

Carpenter, who works for the Laguna Foundation coordinating volunteers, said sometimes it's just a matter of creating an opportunity to help people become volunteers.

Many people want to help with something, but are too caught up in day-to-day life, she said.

"I love working with volunteers," she said. "Give people a chance to get involved and magical things happen for them, too."

This fall, there will be another mass planting, with about 2,000 plants bought by the city.

Anyone wishing to join the Laguna keepers, or help with the planting, set for two Saturdays, Nov. 6 and Nov. 20, may call Carpenter evenings at 829-3835. Weekday planting sessions can be added if service groups or school classes wish to help.