

VOLUNTEERS IN ACTION

Working in the Laguna is an enjoyable outing, Bill Kravetz says.

Forward, MARSH

Fresh air, hard work pay big dividends for 'keepers' of Laguna de Santa Rosa

By RANDI ROSSMANN
Staff Writer

The volunteers labored on Labor Day weekend, choosing to hack back blackberries at the Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetlands Preserve instead of enjoying a more typical holiday weekend activity.

No one seemed to mind. The seven or eight volunteers — Chris Carpenter's "Laguna keepers" — weeded and whacked and chatted and joked through their Saturday morning task.

Armed with their own gardening tools and gloves, they made another push at the restoration of the Laguna preserve near the Morris Street Sebastopol Community Center.

"I didn't have any plans for the weekend," said Connie Parks-Stallman as she sat on a small stool, weeding out the non-native plants and weeds. "I'm laboring for Labor Day."

"I just like to feel like I'm contributing to something in my town," Parks-Stallman said.

Carpenter, who leads the band of regular volunteers, said she worried that a work party might fizzle on a long weekend.

"But we have several dedicated people" who made last week's event a success.

Like Bill Kravetz, who participates

in the work days but also comes by the preserve on his own each week to help water the hundreds of fledgling plants and trees.

"I like to help out and hopefully we'll restore the Laguna," said Kravetz. "It's an enjoyable outing. Fresh air, exercise and entertainment," he said, taking a break from cutting back low-hanging tree branches.

The wetlands preserve is a small piece of the picturesque Laguna, which is centered in western Sebastopol but stretches from Cotati to the Russian River.

The preserve consists of a few acres of wetlands, marshes and oak savannah that is home to a variety of wildlife. The preserve meanders alongside the busy Community Center and adjoining ballfields.

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

Decades ago, that area held the city dump and part of the city's sewage treatment plants, which shows how people regarded wetlands in the past, said Kenyon Webster, Sebastopol's planning director.

Restoring the area is part of the city's master plan and the city's desire to value the area as an ecological resource, Webster said.