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Volunteers rescue plants for Laguna

by Frank Robertson
Sonoma West Staff Writer

SEBASTOPOL — Volunteers planted hundreds of tufts of oat grass in the city's Laguna park last week after rescuing the native grass from the construction site of a new mall.

"We were one step ahead of the bulldozers," said Rocky Thompson, an environmental restoration planner who helped orchestrate the rescue.

Thompson saw "a fantastic opportunity" to save hundreds of oat grass plants that otherwise would have been bulldozed to make way for the new Wal-Mart and Home Depot stores in Windsor.

Thompson, a Sebastopol resident and member of the city's planning commission, knew the city needs native shrubs and grasses for the restoration effort under way in the new Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetlands Preserve.

Oat grass, *danthonia californica*, grows wild in the Laguna watershed, making it "a perfect match, a great match," in its new home, said Thompson, a restoration planner for Circuit Rider Productions.

About a dozen volunteers from Sonoma State University's environmental studies department and the federal Americorps program lugged sacks of oat grass to the Laguna last week and replanted the native species alongside the park's new Loretta Blincoe memorial trail.

From 600 to 800 tufts of oat grass, a perennial that grows in bunches from 12 to 18 inches tall, will be planted along the Laguna trail starting from the park's entry kiosk on Morris Street. Pink flags decorate the new grassy area to identify the plant locations for ease of maintenance, said Thompson.

"What's unique about this is that this plant does not readily reproduce itself from seed," said Thompson. "It takes many years for the seeds to germinate. You can't go out and buy plants of this from a restoration nursery."

Thompson credited Christine Childress, Americorps' regional co-ordinator, for helping to make the oat grass rescue a success.

The strong "community impact of the project" made it a natural for Americorps, said



PUTTING DOWN ROOTS — Rocky Thompson helped volunteers transplant oat grass at the city's Laguna wetlands preserve last week.

Childress.

Since last year Americorps crews have helped remove blackberries, garbage, and fences as part of the Laguna restoration effort.

Mary Rausch, an environmental conservation and restoration major at SSU, helped plant grass last week as

part of her studies. Rausch will get one unit of college credit for logging 45 hours in the Laguna effort this semester.

"I like the work," said Rausch, on muddy hands and knees as she patted soil around oat grass roots last week. "We're going to plant oaks in the beginning of March."