

Volunteers pull junk out of Lawrence river

By Crystal Bozek , Staff Writer
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LAWRENCE - The term "everything but the kitchen sink" did not apply to yesterday morning's cleanup on the Spicket River.

About 750 volunteers, braving the pouring rain, pulled out loads of junk including rusted bicycles, a cut-open safe, a snowblower, a bath tub - and yes, a cracked kitchen sink - from the river's bed.

Volunteers even fished out a shotgun in its case, which they turned over to Lawrence police.

"You could put a car together with all this stuff," said Lawrence High sophomore Diego Murillo, 14, pointing to a pile of metal auto parts sitting on the river bank on Marston Street. "I'm serious."

The effort was organized by Groundwork Lawrence, a nonprofit community rehabilitation group.

The group has held cleanups on Lawrence's 3-mile stretch of the river for six years. It has rained five out of the six years.

"I don't know what we'd do if it was sunny out," joked Kate O'Brien, executive director of Groundwork Lawrence.

Volunteers included students from Lawrence High School, Phillips Academy in Andover, Merrimack College and Central Catholic High School, along with workers from New Balance, Lawrence Community Works and Andover-based Enterasys.

O'Brien said the collection of trash has been similar year to year - mostly car parts and tires.

"It's a little disheartening that there's so much out there, but combatting the feeling is that so many people come to the river to help," she said. "We had record-breaking attendance this year."

Kevin Little, an Enterasys employee, drove down from New Ipswich, N.H., to lend a hand at the Scarito Park section of the river, off Brook Street.

Despite being drenched and muddied by noon, Little said it felt great to help.

"We didn't know what we'd find," he said. "We pulled out so many tires. ... And we only made a dent. ... I was happy we cleared a lot of the glass to make it safe for the kids."

Local energy companies Enel North America and Covanta Energy pledged additional workers and heavy equipment to clean their off-river sites, which have long sustained illegal dumping.

O'Brien said she was encouraged by the constant increase in the number of teenagers she sees coming every year.

"It will be interesting to see the future generations," O'Brien said. "Kids are required by their teachers to do community service now. That wasn't how it was when I was a kid. ... Hopefully, these types of projects will really push investment in volunteerism on a broad scale."

Lawrence High senior Robert Maldonado, 17, has been participating in the cleanup for four years and tries to recruit more people to the cause every year.

"You feel good about yourself after, and it motivates you to come back again," he said. "Especially, when you realize this is where your drinking water comes from. It's filtered, but still."

Fishing for trash

A sampling of items pulled from the Spicket River:

- * Shotgun in its case
- * Sewing machine
- * Microwave
- * Toilet seat
- * Snowblower
- * Cut-open safe
- * A sink and bathtub
- * Beds
- * Hundreds of tires

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