

## The Ducks Stop Here: Friends of Orinda Creeks Clean San Pablo Creek for Coastal Cleanup Day

By Friends of Orinda Creeks

The rusty nine-iron cast in to the creek in darkest despair brought squeals of delight from youngsters on hand Saturday to clean up the downtown stretch of San Pablo Creek. But when the team found five rubber ducks, the cleanup race was on. The event, organized by Friends of Orinda Creeks as part of the statewide Coastal Cleanup Day, extended from the Chevron station to well past the 1920 County Bridge. The adventurous Orindans found lampshades, five rubber duckies, the ancient golf club and even a manhole cover. Mostly, however, they found garbage; lots of garbage.

The sizeable group battled Himalayan blackberries, poison oak and very steep banks to extract more than 250-lbs of rubbish, not including a tire, from a beautiful but largely unknown and neglected stretch of one of the San Francisco Bay's largest tributaries, which luckily flows through the heart of Orinda.

Although the thick riparian vegetation made for challenging trash removal, the volunteers were undaunted, and even amazed by the beauty of the creek. "I was conceptually aware that a creek ran through downtown Orinda, but had never taken the time to go look at it and enjoy the tranquility of the site," said volunteer Ellen Griffith. "It's a treasure that I wish more members of our community could enjoy." The riparian vegetation, now fully grown, was planted by FOC volunteers in the early 90s, under the leadership of Cinda Mackinnon. "Despite the challenges ahead with restoration, it's important to recognize how far we've come," said Mackinnon. "It's just so rewarding to see the vegetation mature into wildlife habitat, and to see so many Orindans here enjoying it on this beautiful sunny day."

Orinda mother Jemima Kiss took a break from packing for her trip to England the next day to come help out. Jemima struggled with her two sons Artley (9) and Herbie (6) to extricate a carpet woven around a tree trunk during high flows. "This is so much more fun than I expected!" exclaimed Artley as Jemima groaned in good humor. "It was hard but rewarding to pick hundreds of tiny pieces of styrofoam out of the creek, and yards of twisted wrapping film, because now we know they won't end up flowing down to the sea and killing marine life," said Kiss.

Before launching the cleanup, board members provided a brief history of San Pablo Creek, the Friends' efforts to improve it, and now their ambitious plan to restore much of it to its former glory. "In the 1950s, 'Progress' dictated that Camino Pablo be widened, and San Pablo Creek be narrowed and straightened to resemble the neckties of the day," said board member Michael Bowen. "Nearly overnight, we went from trout fishing downtown to abandoning the creek altogether," Bowen continued. "Now we hope to embrace the creek again, provide more room for the creek to flow, space for people to enjoy it, and maybe even bring back a trout or two."

"We have done our contribution with all of our volunteers today to stem the litter from reaching the Ocean," said Friends of Orinda Creeks board member and Orinda legend Toris Jaeger. "But there is much more that needs to happen in our community, especially where we shop."

Supported by voluntary donations, Friends has retained a consulting firm, FlowWest, to do conceptual design and engineering for a creek restoration suitable for the downtown area. Friends is working closely with the City of Orinda's Planning Department, which is moving forward on its own Streetscape Plan. The City and FOC are working cooperatively to identify opportunities for parkettes, creek trails and other amenities that will promote enjoyment of the local watershed, and improve pedestrian and other opportunities in downtown Orinda.

"We are working very closely and fruitfully with the City staff, and believe these two efforts are highly complementary," said Board President Bob Stoops.

FOC is communicating with the property owners along San Pablo Creek both to better manage garbage inputs, and to seek partnership opportunities in creek restoration. "Our discussions are going well. We have so much potential to realize in this section of creek," said Stoops. "Now it's up to Orindans, the property owners and the City to come together and make it happen."

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