

New youth group removing graffiti in Moorpark

By Michele Willer-Allred

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Fourteen-year-old Jared Englander stood underneath a Spring Street bridge that spans the Arroyo Simi in Moorpark, armed with a brush in one hand and a paint-filled bucket in the other.

Jared joined other youths Saturday in battling a graffiti problem that has continuously plagued not only the portion of the arroyo under Spring Street, but also throughout the city.

Sheriff's Deputy Christopher Starks, with the Moorpark Police Department and a school resource officer, said graffiti in the arroyo was getting pretty bad. Because it is in the flood-control area, police had to approach the Ventura County Watershed Protection District about what they can do to get rid of the graffiti.

"Every time you have a bridge or overpass over the arroyo, you can see that it's just covered in graffiti," Starks said. He said he told the watershed district "that we'll get the volunteers to clean it up and make Moorpark a prettier place."

The Sheriff's and Youth Graffiti Removal Incident Team (SAY GRIT) was formed. It's made up of police and youth volunteers in the community.

The group completed paperwork last week making the "Adopt-a-Channel" program official.

Starks said some volunteers have been in trouble or are going down the wrong path. Some wanted to get school community service hours. Others just wanted to do good.

The group kicked off its program Saturday with 11 volunteers joining Starks and police Capt. Ron Nelson in the portion of the arroyo under Spring Street.

Pernille Carpenter, the program's coordinator for the watershed district, said both juveniles and adults have been arrested in the area under Spring Street as well as other areas visible to the public.

"These repairs cost the district thousands of dollars to repair, and due to the volunteers' exemplary efforts, the watershed district can recover those expenditures," Carpenter said.

Stark said: "In some ways, it's given the vandals a fresh canvas, but the Moorpark Police Department is very proactive in catching those that graffiti and prosecuting them. I'm documenting all the graffiti we find and the new stuff that goes up. If the kids get caught, they're going to be held responsible for it."

"It feels good to help clean up," said Olivia Starks, 15, who joined her sister Selena Starks, 11, at the cleanup.

Randy Franco, 18, participated in the cleanup to fulfill community service hours at his school.

"There's quite a lot of graffiti down here," he said.

Jared inspected the wall he just covered with paint.

"It's tough work, but it pays off. It does make it look a lot nicer," he said. "It never really bothered me before. But, now that I'm cleaning it up, I'm going to be really mad if

someone tags over it."



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