

Rocky Pt. cleanup a twofer for Pilgrim senior

By John Howell



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ON THE HUNT: One of the 80 volunteers who participated in Saturday's cleanup pauses to take in the scenery.



Matt Morris took the “podium” Saturday morning, actually a large block of cement at the former entrance of the Rocky Point amusement park.

The Pilgrim High School senior stood on the block in front of more than two-dozen people. They ranged in age from elementary school children to senior citizens. They wore jeans, T-shirts and gloves. This was the number Morris planned for, but more than 75 people turned out before the morning ended.

Morris seemed amazingly relaxed as the leader of such a group. His message was about safety and the dos and don'ts for the battalion of volunteers about to rout trash from between the rocks, along the beach and in the brush of the 41 acres bought by the city almost three years ago.

He suggested teaming up on especially heavy trash and leaving needles and razor blades they find to the personnel equipped to do it. Leave organic material, such as branches, seaweed and leaves just where they were.

He also had something else to tell the group and he held up a set of bathroom scales. As people filled black plastic trash bags, he wanted to weigh them.

The coordinating of volunteers and measuring their efforts is all part of two projects Morris needs to complete in order to graduate from high school and earn his Boy Scout Eagle Badge. He is a member of Troop 49 Lakewood.

Morris selected working with volunteers for his graduation by proficiency project. He teamed up with Save the Bay and Stephany{* ok *} M. Hessler, the organization's volunteer and internship manager, who has been serving as his mentor.

“He wanted to do a cleanup,” Hessler said. At first, Goddard Park seemed a possibility, until Save the Bay hooked up with the Rocky Point Foundation and it became the chosen site.

Morris recruited volunteers from Warwick schools and the Boy Scouts. As an Eagle Scout candidate, Morris has to select and complete a community service project. High School requires the same. The two objectives fit together perfectly and he was off.

Not until yesterday, after tallying, did Hessler learn that the two-hour cleanup was the largest in Save the Bay history.

“It was huge,” she said. Eighty volunteers, she said, picked up 3,558 pounds of trash.

Conditions Saturday couldn't have been more perfect for a cleanup. The tide was out, the sun was up and there wasn't much wind. Just as Hessler predicted – “We always find a tire” – Danny Hall was pulling a tire from between the rocks, barely a half-hour into the cleanup. This was a big one, probably off a tractor, and had to be rolled along the rocky beach to one of several collection areas. City crews later picked up the collections.

“This is more exercise than I imaged,” Hall said, puffing as he sought to steady the tire before it took off or fell over, splashing its content of bay water.

Other volunteers, like Janet O'Connell, stuck to the smaller stuff including glass and plastic bottles, fishing line, Styrofoam and assorted cans. There was no lack of any of that small stuff, although, on first glance, the city section of the park looked well kept. O'Connell, who has lived in the neighborhood for the past 32 years, visits the park almost daily. She's pleased by what she sees. She said throughout the day there are cyclists and walkers on the trails who she described as respectful. She has also seen plenty of wildlife, including fox, fisher cats and wild turkey.

When the state gets the remaining 83 acres of the former park, she hopes the shore dinner hall and palladium will be razed and the area allowed to go back to its natural state. She called City Park “a good model” of what it could be.

As for commercial activity that would generate revenue to make the park self-sustaining, O'Connell was hesitant.

“Let's not repeat the mistakes of the past,” she said.

Acquiring the remaining park acreage is a ways off – the state needs to complete an appraisal of the land before making an offer to the Small Business Administration, the court appointed receiver. But for Morris, the city portion is already yielding benefits. It is a place to prove himself and serve the community. And, he has started something that may become a tradition.

“The Rocky Point Foundation and Save The Bay hopes this is a cleanup we can continue to partner with the city on once or twice a year. I think this first cleanup certainly proves there is a need at the site and additionally a large community interest in keeping the site clean and preserved,” Hessler said in an e-mail yesterday.