

Locals team up to clean, learn on Earth Day

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(Photo: Dan Reiner/The Journal News)

ARDSLEY - Volunteers from across the Lower Hudson Valley seeking to make the planet cleaner and more sustainable came out in bunches Saturday despite soggy conditions.

Earth Day efforts kicked off in southern Westchester, where Groundwork Hudson Valley held its 8th Annual Great Saw Mill River Cleanup. More than 300 volunteers at eight work sites, spreading from Elmsford to Yonkers, helped clean up the waterway that serves as a tributary to the Hudson River.

Volunteers spent the day cutting obstructive vines and picking up trash along the river, including areas along the South County Trailway and local roads.

"What we realized is that if you can't see the river, you don't really care about it," said Holly Malekian, a Dobbs Ferry resident and development director at Groundwork Hudson Valley. "As soon as those vines start to clear and you see the river, and hopefully there's not a bunch of garbage in it, people say 'Oh, we actually have a nice river here.'"

The organization hoped to clear more than 7,000 pounds of trash from the river, Malekian said.

Simone Schuster, a White Plains resident, said she used to volunteer on Earth Day in college, but wasn't involved after she graduated.

"I always enjoyed it – planting things or cleaning up – but as an adult after college, nobody was telling me about it so I didn't really seek it out," she said.

Recently, however, White Plains-based Dannon Company, where she works, asked employees to volunteer, so she jumped on board. Dannon was one several local companies to send volunteers Saturday, including Rivertowns Square and Yonkers Tennis Center.

Steven Losier, a Dannon employee from New City, is a member of the Rockland County Haiti Relief group which aids victims of the 2010 earthquake. He said he was looking to get more involved locally to help the earth.

"I've always been conscious about our personal imprint on the earth as far as emissions and how we treat the earth," Losier said. "Cleaning up some bottles off the side of the road makes a big impact so I'm just happy to be a part of that."

The Saw Mill Cleanup was one of many Earth Day events held Saturday in Westchester and Rockland. In Ossining, for example, the county's largest community Earth Day festival took place along the Hudson River at Louis Engel Waterfront Park.

Green Ossining's 7th Annual Earth Day Festival hosted nearly 100 vendors — its most ever — to teach patrons about food sustainability, energy efficiency and other green clean efforts. The group's chairwoman, Suzie Ross, said the goal is to have each attendee go home with one new idea.

"We're not pushing crazy activism, we're not a bunch of hippies, it's kind of simple stuff," Ross said. "Our biggest ambition is that people go home with maybe one thing that they've learned that could make this world a better planet."

Earth Day and sustainability events in the Lower Hudson Valley continue throughout the next few weeks. Learn about events near you here.



Steven Losier, of New City, picks up trash in Ardsley (Photo: Dan Reiner/The Journal News)