

SECTION B

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LOCAL NEWS

Polishing our world on Earth Day

Under an overcast sky, volunteers clean up roadways and water sites, while Warwick Mall hosts clean-energy exhibitions as part of the Earth Day Festival.

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Volunteers braved the chill of a gray spring day yesterday to clean up parks and shorelines at about 50 sites around Rhode Island, showing their concern for the environment on Earth Day.

And shoppers at the Warwick Mall got a glimpse at why it all matters as 41 exhibitors displayed their work and vision during Rhode Island's Earth Day Festival, held indoors this year for the first time.

In Pawtucket, about three dozen volunteers gathered at Slater Mill, the birthplace of American industrial pollution, to try to undo some of the two centuries' worth of polluting the river.

Dave Sherman was there from Blackstone,

Mass. — his girlfriend works at the mill — reaching down from the grassy field across the river from the mill, snagging an old 10-speed bicycle with a rake and lifting it onto the grass.

A shimmering cobalt-blue frame was still visible through a coating of river grime, and the letters "dmaster" were readable on the bike.

They dragged the grimy bike, as well as a rusting CVS shopping cart, over to where about a dozen yard-waste bags were standing, full of leaves, branches, mildewed sweatshirts, plastic foam cups and broken bikes. Before noon, the volunteers had filled nearly two dozen bags.

Francine Murphy-Brillon, marketing director for Slater Mill, organized yesterday's Earth Day activities in the area along the river by the mill. It

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JOURNAL PHOTO / FRIEDA SQUIRES

Alex Fournier, 13, of Narragansett, picks up trash along the causeway on Bonnet Shores, in Narragansett, during yesterday's annual spring cleanup.

Earth

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was not new to her; she's been involved in cleaning up the Blackstone since the first Earth Day, and the first "ZAP the Blackstone" cleanup, in 1973, when it was thought that volunteers pulled 10,000 tons of trash from the river. Yesterday's volunteers may have measured their progress in the number of bags filled, but Murphy-Brillon said she has seen real progress over three decades.

"I remember the first ZAP the Blackstone. We were pulling out refrigerators, cars," she said, leaning on a railing by the riverbank opposite Slater Mill, watching the river flow over the dam. "If you got into that same water 30 years ago... well, I had welts on my legs for three weeks.

"You couldn't stand here," she said. "The smell would have knocked you back."

Murphy-Brillon said she liked the idea that you could have an Earth Day cleanup in an urban area, that there was still an environment worth protecting there.

IN NARRAGANSETT'S Bonnet Shores neighborhood, about 250 people, including University of Rhode Island students and permanent residents, gathered to pick up trash along the streets and the shoreline.

About 170 students showed up this year, compared with about 50 in previous years, event organizer Margie Manning said. The cleanup was paired with a memorial walk for the three URI stu-

dents who disappeared into Narragansett Bay on March 13 after setting out in a rowboat from Bonnet Shores.

Volunteers gathered enough trash from Bonnet Shores. Eastward Look and Point Judith to fill a large trash bin. A lot of it was the inevitable detritus of college life: vodka and beer bottles, a batter's helmet, a football lost by someone named "Langley." There was even a lawnmower someone had dumped in the woods.

Gary Krajewski's best find was an unopened bottle of wine, lying in some brambles near Wesquage Pond. "I guess somebody didn't like that kind of wine," said Krajewski, 22, of Coventry, a senior at URI.

"If this was my neighborhood at home and it was this messy, I wouldn't want it to be like this," senior Alyssa Devin, 21, of Southington, Conn., said. "If the students messed it up, the students should help clean it up."

Mary Beth Holland, 63, who lives nearby, patrolled Bonnet Shores Road with a pointed stick, picking up cigarette butts. She lives just up the hill from where the three students disappeared. "We usually get a few URI kids, but this year, it kind of brought Bonnet Shores to people's attention," she said.

THE TOTAL AMOUNT of trash collected won't be known for a few days, after every group files reports, said Terri Bisson, program services officer for the state Department of Environmental Management and a member of the Earth Day Rhode Island Committee.



JOURNAL PHOTO / FRIEDA SQUIRES

Katie Dickinson, Dara Skobel, Jenn Roitburg and Sarah McCormick — members of the Chi Omega sorority at URI, pick up trash along the roads in the Bonnet Shores area of Narragansett during yesterday's spring cleanup.

Some 80 cleanups were scheduled, most of them held yesterday. Most started before the rain, but not before the gray skies and chilly breezes.

"Actually, this kind of weather is good for a cleanup," Bisson remarked. "You work hard. You sweat."

Bisson, however, was indoors yesterday, coordinating the Earth Day Festival at the Warwick Mall. This was the first year the main event was held inside. Smaller events were also held at the Roger Williams Park Zoo and Audubon Society of Rhode Island's Environmental Education Center in Bristol.

In past years, wind and rain could not stop intrepid volunteers — but it did limit the visits to booths and displays. So Bisson

was pleased to be indoors.

Also, the mall festival brought the environmental message to a different audience — weekend shoppers.

Yesterday they were learning from 41 displays about such things as plans to manufacture heating oil from soybeans and recycled waste grease in Providence, rechargeable batteries, how an estuary functions, and the beauty of Rhode Island's woods on the 100th anniversary of the state's forestry division.

"The public is engaged," Bisson said. "It's an opportunity for them to rekindle their environmental connections."

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