



Pathfinder

"Ability may get you to the top, but only character will keep you there."

John Wooden

Teamwork Matters

A message from
the City Manager



JASON STILWELL

Anyone can stand on the sidelines and complain. Others get involved and make a difference. By helping others in need, being a catalyst, this is what instills a sense of pride in your community. It all starts with the simple question, what can we do to help you?

That is the essence of Serve Santa Maria. This local organization was established by Pastor Carl Nielsen of Bethel Lutheran Church months after an inspirational visit to New Orleans for a Christian youth conference. In service to that host community, the 38,000 students and chaperones in attendance banded together to repaint schools, refurbish parks, and fulfill other needs that remained five years after the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina.

Back in Santa Maria, Pastor Nielsen broached the idea of starting an ongoing public-service effort serving this community with the Santa Maria Valley Ministerial Association. With its support, he introduced the plan to then-Mayor Larry Lavagnino. When Lavagnino introduced Nielsen to Recreation and Parks Director Alex Posada, a seed was planted. In April 2010, Serve Santa Maria tackled its first assignment: painting over all the graffiti under the Santa Maria River 101 Bridge.

Twice a year, several hundred volunteers from local churches, and from the general public, converge at the Abel Maldonado Community Youth Center on an early Saturday morning to receive assignments, be organized into teams, and then be deployed to service projects. The Salvation Army provides a

complimentary lunch for participants. In its 10 years, Serve Santa Maria has become one of the largest and most successful neighborhood beautification programs in the City. Projects are determined and coordinated by the Serve Santa Maria Leadership Team. Ideas come in different ways. City staff identify some projects, such as homeowners who may be facing code violations, but lack the means or ability to fix their properties. The Recreation and Parks Department always has projects to spruce-up parks.

Projects typically range from planting trees and raking bark chips in City parks, to painting benches and improving playgrounds by painting murals of the USA map at local schools, and planting landscaping, to removing graffiti and trash, even to rehabilitating homes, mobile homes, and mending fences and cleaning-up yards for those occupants that are unable to perform the work themselves. Its website is www.servesantamaria.com.

The significant amount of volunteer work performed at City parks and facilities enables the City to tackle some projects that may have been put on hold due to staff reductions. This volunteer effort has to-date saved the City from paying an estimated tens of thousands of dollars for grounds maintenance, planting and landscape installation, graffiti abatement and trash collection throughout local parks.

Saturday, May 4th marks the 17th Serve Santa Maria Day - and I invite you to join me there. You don't have to have a membership card to help. If you'd like to volunteer, everyone is welcome.

It is very helpful to have gloves, sunscreen, and gardening tools like shovels, metal rakes and wheel barrows, weed eaters, etc. See you there!

Jason