

“Take a Bite out Blight” finishes 49th project, its future is in question

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The drizzling rain keeps many indoors on winter weekends, but not the “Take a Bite out of Blight” crew. The dedicated volunteers were at it again on Saturday, Jan. 25, clearing trash for their 49th project.

“Take a Bite out of Blight” is a crusade to clean up Del Norte County, created by Roger Gitlin, the Del Norte County District 1 Supervisor. Since 2013, he and volunteers have taken on the task of cleaning littered areas of the county.

Gitlin’s work with maintaining the county’s cleanliness began after he was elected to office. So the future of “Take a Bite out of Blight” is in question as the county Board of Supervisors election is approaching, and

Gitlin has no plans of running for re-election. He hopes, however, that his mission will continue without his leadership and that residents will remain invested in eradicating land disarray.

“I served two full terms. It’s time for me to do other things...I’d like to see the program continue where people in our community are willing, able and anxious to serve and help keep our beautiful community pristine,” he said.

The work could continue as Gitlin has built up a committed team of volunteers who are willing to show up, rain or shine.

Gitlin awoke on Saturday morning to hear raindrops tapping his roof, and he thought, “No one is going to volunteer today.” But when he approached the cluttered ravine on the corner of Old Mill Road and Northcrest Drive a little before 8:30 a.m., around a dozen people were waiting, ready to begin work.

For three hours, the group trampled through mud and drizzle filling trash bags and lugging them uphill to the dumpster until they had cleared three tons of debris from the ravine. The rain came down vigilantly around 11:30 a.m. right after they had finished what they hoped to accomplish.

“It was probably one of the toughest volunteer jobs,” Gitlin said. “In my humble opinion, [the volunteers] are heroes for their dedication.”

Home Depot Crescent City provided trash bags and bottled water, and Alex Campbell, its general manager, was among the volunteers. Missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, County Building and Maintenance Director Allen Winogradov and County Code Enforcement Officer Dominic Mello, among other residents, donated their time to the cause as well.

“This is where we live. This is our home,” Gitlin said. “I am just so proud of the people who believe in maintaining the integrity and the pristine beauty of this area.”

Gitlin has passionately led the 49 community clean-up projects, which have included clearing wetlands, covering graffiti and throwing out trash, because he has seen cities throughout California getting increasingly littered.

“Those areas are remaining clean, and we’re getting an upper hand on it,” he said. “We have to say vigilant. You cannot give up. If you give up, we become San Francisco, and then it becomes an impossible task.”