

## Working away on MLK Day

### Holiday brings out volunteers in Napa

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Trading in patient charts for pruning shears and paint brushes, about a dozen Kaiser Permanente employees rolled up their sleeves Monday to pitch in at Cope Family Center.

Michelle Grupe, Cope's associate director, said Monday's volunteers probably saved her organization about \$1,000 in labor and materials — money she says can go a long way toward helping the approximately 1,500 families Cope links annually to emergency aid, food, housing, transportation and health insurance services.

Grupe said that the agency is limited to spending between \$2,000 and \$3,000 annually on the center's repair and upkeep.

"We own our house, so there are always a lot of home repairs to do. ... And especially during these economically trying times, it's great to have the help," she said.

Clad in long-sleeved T-shirts bearing Kaiser's logo and a screen-printed likeness of Martin Luther King Jr., some volunteers raked leaves and trimmed robust rose bushes while others went to work renovating Cope's aging wooden staircase.

As a whole, the group was carrying out Kaiser's tradition of turning Martin Luther King Jr. Day — a day off for some — into a "day on" for volunteer community service.

Monday's event marked the third consecutive year of spending the holiday volunteering with colleagues and community members for Shannon Hall, a Kaiser information technology business consultant.

“I think it brings people together. ... There’s that sense of working together for the community (and) it makes you feel good,” she said.

Working near a lineup of black trash bags stuffed with dried leaves, pungent geranium branches and thorny rosebush clippings, Napan Michele Arnold — a Kaiser physical therapist — spent part of the day working alongside her daughter, 11-year-old Amelia Arnold.

“We’ve got needs within our own community and it’s great to be able to help,” Michele Arnold said. “It’s part of our organization’s mission and I think it’s part of our personal mission.”

Also hard at work was Tony Staats, a 17-year-old Napa High School student who said he also logged volunteer hours in New Orleans to help the city rebuild after Hurricane Katrina hit the area in 2005. On Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Staats stuck closer to home, teaming up with his mother, Carolyn Staats, a Napa State Hospital nursing instructor, and Nancy Murchison, a Kaiser registered nurse who is his godmother and aunt.

Posted alongside a lawn-side stash of paint cans, an air compressor, sander and other tools, 11-year-old Corey Riddle, waited for her father to return from a lumber yard run before helping to replace a rotting step on Cope’s outdoor staircase, in addition to painting and caulking over the structure’s rough patches.

“We’re doing this today because it’s Martin Luther King Day. ... I feel like it’s important to do this because it’s helping out the community,” she said.

Joining the Kaiser employees in the spirit of volunteerism Monday was another group whose work was organized by the city of Napa, the Volunteer Center of Napa Valley and a local political group.

About 125 people ranging in age from 6 to 86 spent Monday morning painting over graffiti and picking up litter in central Napa, according to Hilary Zunin, a self-described community organizer and member of the currently nameless group formerly known as Napans for Obama.

The roving gang launched their clean-up efforts on Pueblo Street between Jefferson Street and California Boulevard, and painted over graffiti along the path of the Wine Train and in other areas, said Tina Chechourka, a Napa code enforcement officer.

Zunin said her organization owes its strong turnout to spreading the word via e-mail, adding that this was her first year participating in a city-wide

clean-up.

“Until the Obama campaign, I was a hard-working Napan who loved the community but didn’t do enough. ... (Our group is) committed to helping serve (organizations) in the Napa community and to helping Napa thrive,” she said.

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