



Wayne White/Herald-Chronicle

Volunteers Brady Kentfield, Fort Hays State University, Keith Thompson, Osage City, and Skyler Wainwright, Melvern, work to remove rocky obstacles on Melvern's new hiking and biking trail during an April 19 work day.



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Trail volunteers Dee Robinson and Tim Gogolski point out to Max Robinson a beaver swimming below them in an old quarry near Melvern's river trails.

Melvern Trail

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Brungardt said the Melvern project would serve as a model for learning institutions across the state to investigate ways to collaborate.

"Collaboration, if done between these schools and done correctly, could benefit the state," he said. "Imagine working together, what we could do for the state."

Brungardt said Kansas Corps was also taking valuable lessons from the Melvern project. The weekend's work showed how teamwork and organization was necessary to the success of a project.

"We've seen that community involvement, the Westar team with their equipment, the Kansas Trails Council, and leadership have been critical," he said. "We've learned things here we'll use in the future."

While Westar's crew worked tirelessly on the bridge, they shunned praise of their efforts, accepting the work as duty to the community and state. The Green Team conducts work projects across the state, volunteering weekends to help others. A recent project had been planting trees in Greensburg, to help that town recover from a disastrous tornado.

Green Team member Mike Noland, of DeSoto, said the amount of volunteers at Melvern surprised his crew.

"I've been on the Green Team for 20 years," Noland said. "I've never seen a crew this big."

Kansas PRIDE representative Sherry Davis said the volunteerism of Melvern shined as an example of community pride.

"Melvern is the best group of volunteers I've ever worked with," Davis said.

"This is a community that truly has a sense of community. They still have a lot of visions for things that can happen."

Bud Davis, of Salina, a trail volunteer said Melvern's pride was evident.

"This is a good community, doing a lot of good things," he said.

Mayor Burnett, in welcoming the students to Melvern, also spoke of the importance of Melvern's volunteers and their community involvement.

"I thanked [the students] and I explained I didn't know how many were from small towns, but small towns are really good about rallying around projects like this," he said. "Nothing in small towns happens without volunteers who are interested in their communities and willing to help out in any way they can."

"I told them we were really happy they were there."

Throughout the day, trail volunteers Robinson and Lacey helped where they could, but their happiness at the students' efforts showed in their smiles.

"It's their day," Lacey said of the students. "It's their event. But, it's our long event. It's really working into a good thing."

Arriving at a Destination

After the bustling day, progress on the trail park was evident. Members of the Kansas Trails Council, led by local volunteer Tim Gogolski, planned trail routes; Westar's Green Team and students constructed the bridge across a ravine; a team including city councilman Mike Volkman and his family built picnic tables; teams of students

and volunteers cleared and built almost two miles of trails during the day; many bags of antique trash was removed from the old landfill site.

"These kids did a lot of work," Bush said. "They looked like they were having fun, and they were working hard."

Kari Luna, a student volunteer from Valley Center, agreed a day of hard work could also be fun.

"We've been having a lot of fun in our group. We've been having a good time and getting dirty," she said. "I'll be sunburned tomorrow though."

Brett McPherson, a student volunteer from Pratt Community College, said he believes Kansas Corps' volunteer spirit could be contagious.

"I thought it'd be really nice to be able to give back to the community, even though it's not my community," McPherson said. "I think these people are going to love it and get plenty of use out of it. Maybe one day they'll return the favor."

After the students departed, though, the town is again working with its limited number of volunteers, but the vision continues. Future plans for the site include a picnic area, restrooms, and an outdoor classroom to teach students about riparian and wetlands environments, and the importance of water quality.

Burnett said he hopes the volunteers' efforts will inspire others. He pointed to Melvern's past efforts in developing a community center and future plans to build a skateboard park.

"I know there are some folks involved in all these projects. Hopefully we'll be able to sustain that in coming years ... eventually it's going to be a different

crowd," he said.

"Hopefully, people who live in Melvern and move to Melvern will take pride in their community in the way we've been seeing. I just hope the younger generation appreciates what has been done here."

In a small town, Burnett said, "all it takes is handful of people that make things happen, a few tend to get things started and get people excited."

As for Bush, his life is busy with farming and his job; he says he's unsure if he'll have much time to enjoy his idea turned reality. Though he has spent time working on the trail, he dismisses his involvement as minor.

"I basically did it for everyone else," he said. "It



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Dedicated Melvern trail volunteer Joyce Lacey fills bags with old trash dug from the path of a planned trail near the Marais des Cygnes River. The site was once the city's trash dump.

something for everybody else, to make them happy."

"It's coming along, it's one of those things you've got to have patience, it's not an overnight thing," he said. "We're taking an old city dump and we're turning it into park."

But, as with other local

volunteers, Bush's wife, Roxie, who also works on the trail, recognizes the value of one person taking action.

"You've got to have somebody to get things going," she said, "and sometimes all it takes is a letter."

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