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What a mess!

Students clean up debris as an environmental project



WHAT A CHORE – Bayonne High School students found a sea of bottles and other junk during this year's Earth Day cleanup.

By Al Sullivan

Reporter senior staff writer

Camal Lockett, a 10th grader at Bayonne High School, got a shock when he came out to help clean up the bayside beach behind the school on April 24. The beach was filled with bottles as far as he could see.

Record high tides, accompanied by one of the worst nor'easters in recent history, had washed onto the shore the usual assortment

of junk, from oil cans and automobile tires to driftwood and foam cups. Yet on this occasion, the beach also displayed a massive collection of plastic bottles, from water bottles to soda bottles.

Lockett, who had come out for a cleanup last October, said, "This is a lot worse."

Tom Tokar, the head of the "Bayonne: Cleaner and Greener" program, said that he

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ANYTHING CAN SHOW UP – Along with thousands of plastic bottles, driftwood and even a child's car flowed up to the beach behind Bayonne High School.

CLEANUP *from cover*

had never seen litter as bad as on this occasion. He said he was angry that, while the city of Bayonne has done its best to keep litter from the streets, other cities have not done their part to keep litter out of Newark Bay and other waterways around Bayonne.

"If the state says Bayonne has to do it, why aren't other towns upstream being forced to do it also?" Tokar asked.

Konyi Fuentes, also a 10th grader from Bayonne High School, found a prescription bottle from an East Orange pharmacy, one small piece of evidence to prove that some – if not all – of the debris washing up on Bayonne's shores is from other communities.

Part of Earth Day activities

The goal of "Cleaner and Greener" is to empower residents to make Bayonne a model urban community where trees, flowers, shrubs and natural wildlife can flourish without risk and the community can remain clean and free of pollution.

As part of weeklong Earth Day celebrations, Tokar and Donna Kiel, two science teachers at the high school, organized a multi-school effort to clean up the shoreline in Bayonne.

Early in the week, students from Woodrow Wilson School made their way to Rutkowski Park on the north tip of Bayonne Bay, where they took on the chores of cleanup there.

"We're cleaning up the shore from Rutkowski Park in the north to the foot of Bayonne Bridge in the south and along the



WITHIN SIGHT OF BAYONNE HIGH SCHOOL – Here you can see an old tire, a piece of driftwood, a trash can, and hundreds of bottles with the high school in the background.

remove litter was sponsored by the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission, which supplied the rubber gloves and plastic bags used for the cleanup operations.

involved in cleaning up the beach.

Christopher Brooks, who serves as the education coordinator for the Sewerage Commission, said cleanup is one aspect of a larger program to teach kids about the environment.

"The cleanup is one phase of the program," he said.

PVSC goes into elementary schools during the school year, teaching kids in grades three to eight. Later, kids from seventh and eighth grades as well as students from the high school participate in the actual cleanup.

"The Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission [PVSC] really gets behind us on this," Tokar said, noting that along with the high school students, elementary students from Lincoln Community School and P.S. No. 14 will be

A variety of rubbish

Standing on the shore behind Bayonne High School, Brooks echoed some of the reactions of the students and teachers, saying that the site looked a little like a recycling plant with so many bottles washed up.

"It's ironic," Brooks said. "Just a little while ago I saw a fisherman catching a striped bass. Then I come over here and see this. It is quite a contrast."

He pointed out that some of the larger pieces of lumber that washed up on the beach also pose risks to boaters.

"If you have children on a boat and you strike one of these pieces, children can get hurt," he said.

While the educational program runs from September to June, older students conduct two cleanups, one in October and another at the end of April.

"This year we've gone full blast," he said.

Students wearing green rubber gloves and bearing large plastic bags waded through the landscape littered with bottles and an assortment of other detritus.

Fuentes said the condition of the beach surprised her as she finished picking up more junk and stuffed it into a bag.

Lockett said the strangest thing he saw so far were the legs of a baby doll, although he stepped over a headless teddy bear while nearby a large red plastic car – about the size of a refrigerator – stood against a log. Along with the thousands of plastic bottles, the shore also contained pieces of foam containers for motor oil, and even a fire extinguisher.

Shoes, sneakers and flip-flops were also evident.

"Anything that fits down into a storm-water sewer can end up here," Brooks said. "That's why we try to educate kids about the impact litter can have on the waterways." □

"Anything that fits down into a storm-water sewer can end up here."

– Christopher Brooks

Kill Van Kull," Tokar said.

Bayonne's shores receive a lot of items from places upstream, such as the mouths of the Hackensack and Passaic rivers, as the tide goes out. Tokar said the weeklong effort to