

# Keeping Brentwood's parks spick and span

by Monty Norris  
Staff Writer

One of Brentwood's most popular amenities is its growing number of attractive parks. But they'd be far less clean and beautiful without the hardworking members of Futures Explored, a non-profit organization helping adults with developmental disabilities.

"They're doing a great job," said Steve McLean, a facilities and landscape specialist with the Parks and Recreation Department. "They're out there every day in this heat working hard."

The program is a partnership between Futures Explored Incorporated and the Brentwood Parks and Recreation Department. There are three teams of three to four workers in each, plus a supervisor. Crew supervisors are called "coaches" and workers are referred to as "consumers." They clean up every park in the city and spruce up several parks daily, including City Park, Sunset Park, Veterans Park, Balfour-Guthrie and McClarren. Crew members are paid by the Parks and Recreation Department.

The program is one of many offered by Futures Explored.

"We focus on day programs and employment," explained Bob Royeton, Futures Explored Enclaves Supervisor. "We're developing enclaves for employment for people who can learn to be very capable and hard-working. This is a great first step into the word of employment."



Photo by Monty Norris

Members of Futures Explored keep Brentwood parks clean and beautiful. Above, crew supervisor Martha Hassler washes tables at Veterans Park.

Futures Explored crews began cleaning city parks in 2001. Landscape and Facilities Manager Ken DeSilva was looking for people to help maintain the parks. He contacted Futures Explored and Royeton set up the program, which has proved a major success for both the city and the organization.

"Brentwood has been so good to us," Royeton said. "It is definitely a cutting-edge city. I've been very impressed with the Parks and Recreation staff and city council. The parks staff has been incredible. They have demonstrated kindness and patience with

our people."

Royeton said that over the past five years the program has grown tremendously as the city grows and adds more parks.

Everyone involved in the program seems happy. Jeff Reno, 35, one of the consumers, has been in the program for five years and takes great pride in helping to keep the city's parks clean and beautiful. It's not just a job to him. He's definitely on a mission.

"You don't want people coming to the parks and seeing litter and graffiti," he said. "They won't come to the parks if they

looked like that. It's just weird how, even with all the trash cans, people still throw their trash around. They throw it in the parking lot and under the table. I don't like that."

Reno said he has learned a lot since joining Futures Explored and working in the parks – including how to protect himself from the elements.

"Our job coaches teach us a lot of things," he said. "We learned that when it's hot to wear a hat and drink a lot of water. We also use a lot of sunscreen. If you don't, you can get skin cancer. That's very bad. It can kill you."

Martha Hassler, one of the coaches, learned the hard way about the importance of keeping hydrated.

"The second day on the job I had a heat stroke," she said. "Now I make sure I and all my crew drink a lot of water."

Royeton said that although Futures Explored has only been operating in Brentwood for five years, the organization has been around for 40. It was started in Lafayette by a group of parents with children who were developmentally disabled.

"We now have five sites in Northern California with 100 employees and 350 consumers," Royeton said. "Families can choose whichever services they want. We offer crafts, work experience, like the one here in Brentwood, and educational field trips."

For more information on the organization and its programs, call 284-3240.