

## HEALING HEART OF SANTA FE.

By Dennis J. Carroll

For The New Mexican

Brock Janson, 23, held up part of a rat's skull he found Saturday while joining a volunteer Love Your River cleanup crew at Frenchy's Field Park along the Santa Fe River bed.

"Sometimes it's hard to tell the trash from nature," Janson said, placing the skull back where he had found it.

Most of the time, however, it's quite easy.

Janson was among more than 75 people who filled trash bags with glass shards, rusty nails, long-abandoned pieces of plastic and other trash along a 6-mile stretch of the river from Patrick Smith Park to the village of Aqua Fria.

The cleanup was a project of the Santa Fe Watershed Association, which, along with co-sponsors from the city's Keep Santa Fe Beautiful agency, assigned cleanup participants to stretches of the river as they showed up at the park Saturday morning.

The goal was not only the practical aspect of tidying up the dry riverbed but also to reconnect people with the river.

"The Santa Fe River is why this community even exists," said project organizer Mikki Anaya. "The river was the heart of our community."

Melinda Romero Pike, a longtime member of the city's Santa Fe River Commission in its various forms, said she could remember when the river flowed freely through the city before the end of World War II. "You could hand dig a well with a pick and shovel."

Now, she said, because of the mining of the river and all the development along it, "the river is in need of healing," and the aquifer is depleted.

Pike and David Groenfeldt, executive director of Santa Fe Watershed, both said they hope to see the river flowing more often than just the few weeks in the spring and occasionally in the fall, when the city releases water from the bursting Santa Fe Reservoir.

Groenfeldt said the city has taken a step in the right direction by agreeing to more frequent releases.

"A slow release is easier on the channel and better restores the aquifer," he said. "We are on track to put water in the river permanently."

Volunteer Chris Romero agreed. "It would be nice to see the water come through here," he said.

Romero and friend Janiell Roybal had been assigned a stretch of the river just downstream from the park. "It makes us feel like we are making a difference," said Roybal, who had joined the cleanup as part of

an assignment in an English class at Santa Fe Community College.

Glass seemed to be the

most common type of garbage found, but Janson said he

also came upon a rusty mail-box.

In some ways, the cleanup was a source of irritation, a reminder "of all the people who contribute to the trash," Janson said.

But an opportunity to clean up the mess was also a reminder of what can be accomplished when people care enough to act responsibly, he said. "If you want to be part of the green era, you have to show it."

Contact Dennis Carroll

at 986-3091 or [dcarroll@sfnewmexican.com](mailto:dcarroll@sfnewmexican.com).

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