

On the Spicket



ANGIE BEAULIEU/Staff photo

Central Catholic freshman Tim Duty balances on a log in the Spicket River while trying to reach a piece of trash during a cleanup yesterday morning.

Hundreds turn out to clean river

BY ANDY SMITH
STAFF WRITER

LAWRENCE — A group of 365 volunteers waded into the Spicket River yesterday, and came out with shopping carts, baby carriages and bicycles. Comparatively speaking, it was pretty light work.

"This year has been much better than most," said Lesly Melendez, Groundwork Lawrence's Environmental Outreach Coordinator. "The first year, we could've built a car with all the parts we pulled out of the river."

The fourth annual Ground-

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work Lawrence Spicket River Cleanup brought out more volunteers than ever. Each year, the amount of garbage taken from the river has decreased, from 20 tons to 15 to 8.

"It's really encouraging that the places we've already cleaned up have remained clean — and we're not seeing a lot of new

dumping," Melendez said. "That is a great sign that people are beginning to respect the river and look at it in a different way."

Among those who participated in the cleanup were students from Lawrence High School, Central Catholic, Phillips Academy and Merrimack College.

Stephanie Mohika, 17, a Central

Catholic senior from Lawrence, helped clean the river with her twin sister Nadine and fellow senior Christina Gatej of Methuen. The three girls said they were proud to improve their school's surroundings for future students.

"Everybody says how Lawrence is such a bad place," Mohika said. "But so many kids are willing to come to the river each year to try to make it better, and that's important."

Conservation Commission Chairman Tennis Lilly said there is a misperception that preserv-

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ing the environment is more important in rural areas. The Spicket River runs through some of the most densely populated neighborhoods in North Lawrence.

"The environment isn't just New Hampshire or Cape Cod or Western Massachusetts," Lilly said. "It starts in your own backyard. There's great value in promoting green space and the environment in these urban areas — not just environmental value, but cultural and spiritual value."

Melendez said there are currently \$2.5 million of capital pro-

jects in the city's pipeline to improve green space along the river. Construction of a 2.7-acre park has already begun on a former brownfield site behind Brook Street.

Later this fall, members of the Groundwork Green Team, an after-school program for city youth, will work on a detailed survey of the riverbanks to map out a strategy for restoration projects next spring.

Groundwork Lawrence is a nonprofit organization that works outdoors with kids, teaching them about the environment and the creatures that live there.