

Daily Breeze

Greenspace activists congregate to fight ... a parking problem

By Donna Littlejohn, Staff Writer – **Daily Breeze**
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About a dozen teenage environmental activists arrived at a parking space in a busy Hawthorne shopping center Friday.

But they had no car. Instead, they "parked" on foot, bearing signs, folding chairs, potted trees and artificial turf.

Their message? Build more parks.

It was one of dozens of similar demonstrations going on Friday during the second annual "Park(+ing) Day L.A." in Los Angeles County.

The movement, featuring demonstrators who set up impromptu "parks" in empty parking spaces, is dedicated to raising awareness about the need for more parks and green space.

"More green, less concrete," is the way one student put it.

"Gimme a P! Gimme an A! Gimme an R! Gimme a K!"

The demonstrators, students at the Environmental Charter High School in Lawndale, shouted and waved as motorists drove by the group's man-made green oasis in the middle of the busy parking lot near Costco at Rosecrans and Isis avenues.

"Woooo!" they called out to police officers in a squad car, among several motorists who passed by with a horn toot of support.

"We want to get pedestrians out of their cars walking on the streets again and green spaces do that," said Viviana Franco, executive director of the From Lot To Spot organization that helped organize the local demonstration.

"What if we had more parks rather than parking spaces?" she said.

The small band of activists was hard to miss, carrying handmade signs asking motorists to "Honk for Park!" and joining in group chants and cheers.

"We wanted to find a place where there was a lot of foot traffic," Franco said of the busy parking lot choice. "We're getting a lot of support. We're inviting people to hang out with us, have some lunch."



Students from Lawndale Environmental Charter High School create an impromptu park in a Hawthorne parking lot on Friday, attempting to call attention to what they say is a lack of green space in the area. (Brad Graverson/Staff Photographer)

Franco said the goal is for supporters to take the message to their elected officials.

She admits that finding more park space is a challenge. So supporters advocate the greening of even small plots of land, such as highway medians and alleys.

"We're built out so we have to be creative with the space we have," Franco said. "This is a movement that believes any green is good green."

One of the students, Crystal Holmes, 17, said she grew up near a park in Hawthorne, "but it wasn't that safe."

"I'm from Los Angeles and where I come from we don't have that many parks," said Christine Calderon, 17.

The group also handed out fliers highlighting statistics that said Hawthorne has less park space per resident (0.05 of an acre per 1,000 residents) than Lawndale, Inglewood, El Segundo, Long Beach or Los Angeles.

The national average, according to the flier, is 6 to 10 acres of park space per 1,000 residents.

Adding more green space, Franco said, improves communities in a number of ways, from aesthetics to higher home values.

But most importantly, she said, it will help get people out of their cars and walking again.

George Irwin, a retired investor who was sipping his coffee outside the nearby Starbucks, recalled plenty of open space when he was growing up in the early- to mid-1950s in the beach cities. "We had two horses in the backyard," he said.

But park space, he said, can be expensive for cities to acquire and maintain.

And finding it in the first place, he said, is the biggest challenge of all.

When Irwin was told about the group's push to get more park space, he replied: "Is God making more land?"

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