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Team works to expel ghosts from Wilmington's past
An area once overrun with graffiti, gangs and drugs gets a makeover.
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When a group of kids tried to remove years' worth of graffiti in Wilmington's Ghost Town neighborhood Saturday, they needed more than paint brushes.

There were so many layers of thick paint on the walls around a small park on Watson Avenue, they had to scrape it off with chisels.



Weeks after police arrested more than 40 people in the neighborhood known as a haven for gangs and drug dealers, residents finally felt safe enough to venture outside and start the process of cleaning up their neighborhood.

While some painted, others swept, hauled trash, shoveled dirt and cleared abandoned furniture along several streets dotted with modest homes north of Pacific Coast Highway.

Helping out were the nonprofit ShareFest Community Development, Valero refinery workers, police and church groups.

"This is one of our first big events," said Mary Gant of the grass-roots Wilmington Community Organization. "We didn't want to have (the raid) and then just leave it. We're here to make a

difference."

ShareFest is a Torrance-based charity that engages churches, businesses and other local organizations in community projects. Managing Director Chad Mayer said he was thrilled to see so many people helping out.

"Look at all these kids who care about their neighborhood," he said. "They're part of the solution."

In addition to the cleaning efforts, booths were erected along Watson offering residents a chance to get information about banking, real estate and identity theft.

Some residents watched warily as busy volunteers patrolled the streets, but others were grateful for the chance to make a few changes in the neighborhood.

"I grew up in this neighborhood," said Stacey Dent, who lives in Carson but still attends church in Wilmington. "And because I grew up here, it's important to see it restored the way it used to be."

Joyce Stallworth also grew up in Ghost Town. She has watched the area decline but was happy to see decent people taking back the neighborhood.

"On afternoons on Sunday, you can see people walking with kids now," she said.

For 13-year-old Aryans Williams, spending her Saturday pushing a broom wasn't how she would normally want to spend her time, but this was worth it.

"When we see trash and stuff it's annoying," she said.

Before the July 31 raid by Los Angeles police and federal agents, kids were afraid to play at the tiny park - it's so small that it doesn't even have a name. But after cleaning the brick wall, they plan to paint a mural there. And smaller kids will get to leave their palm prints along the bottom.

"Believe me, two months ago, you could find any drug here," said Hortensia Dominguez, who moved into the neighborhood 15 years ago. "Now there's not one person."

Ariadne Miranda lives a few blocks away but came with a group of her friends to pitch in.

"We came here to help and make the neighborhood better," she said. "We did it so the kids could play."

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