



Bryan Fisher will join other Scotts Valley residents and volunteers today at Skypark Linear Park to plant and spruce up the area.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

## Volunteers are long on hard work

*Scotts Valley - 1990*  
**Scotts Valley's**  
 mile-long  
 Linear Garden  
 is a story of  
 perseverance,  
 community  
 pride

By DAN WHITE  
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SCOTTS VALLEY — People here are fiercely proud of their long, skinny garden. Their pride transcends generations. At the mile-long garden near the Skypark housing development, a 5-year-old recently chewed out a 3-year-old for stepping near a plant. An elderly neighbor tidied up a jogging path that runs through the park, and another neighbor, Bryan Fisher, put up a tombstone for a plant that died after a dog relieved itself on it.

"I haven't seen any plants die since then," Fisher said while walking through the garden, which ranges from 30 to 100 feet wide.

As Fisher walked, he pointed out new growth and splashes of orange poppies. Soon, oaks and pines will be shading joggers and Watkins Johnson plant workers on their lunch breaks.

It's no wonder residents are protective of their svelte stretch of land. Their native plant haven was hard won. Recently, it was all hard dirt and weeds on a setback strip, separating homes from the edge of a slope.

Now it's a city park that doubles as a Scotts Valley arboretum.

Originally, this stretch was going to be covered with native grass. But Fisher and his wife, Linda, became inspired after seeing native plant displays at UC Santa Cruz's Arboretum last year.

Skypark developer Kaufman & Broad was originally going to spend \$14,000 planting grasses. Instead, the developers gave the money to the city for native vegetation.

In the fall of 1997, they and other residents began to argue that native plants would be more practical and attractive than grasses. They said they worried that grass would be a fire hazard. The Linear Garden has no irrigation.

Neighbors suggested drought-resistant native plants be used in place of the grass. The city was convinced that this expanse of coyote brush, iris, buckwheat and oak trees just might work. Skypark developer Kaufman & Broad was originally going to spend \$14,000 planting grasses. Instead, the developers gave the money to the city for native vegetation.

Gradually, the seed of an idea developed into a full-fledged partnership between

residents, the city and the developer. Each Skypark household pays \$200 a year to maintain the garden, which is owned by Scotts Valley.

Local residents turned to Moss Landing Native Plant Supply for vegetation and advice.

Scotts Valley workers and Skypark neighbors have spread 60 truckloads of mulch on this place and spent 1,500 hours of labor. Folks from Councilwoman Sheryl Ainsworth to City Manager Chuck Comstock have gotten their hands dirty, helping out with shovels, shovels and encouragement.

Community Development Director Laura Kuhn, who has done her share of planting, spoke enthusiastically about fescue, iris and fuchsia coming up in the garden.

"It was yuck out there," she said. All of them are marveling at the changes. Sage, manzanita and buckwheat are starting to grow in a barren place. The planters predict the park will be self-sustaining, requiring no water or pruning, in two years.

The project remains vulnerable. The 5,000 plants are still young. But Bryan Fisher predicts this skinny park, by the year 2000, "should be very well filled out."

For more information on the planting effort, call Laura Kuhn at 438-4324. The planters will be at Skypark Drive today, working on the Linear Garden, from 9-11 a.m. They will meet at the tennis courts at the end of Coast Range Drive.