

Local

Labor Day weekend safety stressed

■ CHP maximum enforcement period begins Friday evening

By John Schelbe
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Millions of Southern Californians are expected to hit the road this Labor Day weekend for summer's last hurrah.

In years past, the Automobile Club of Southern California has forecast how many travelers it expects will head out for the Labor Day holiday.

But not this year. "Part of the reason is because this coming Labor

Day will be a shorter week-end comparatively," Jeffrey Spring, a spokesman for the club, said on Monday.

Many school districts are going into the fall semester in August, earlier than they did in the past, Spring said. This means that families with school-age children will most likely have to wait until late Friday or early Saturday, instead of leaving on a

Thursday or Friday morning as they once might have.

A survey of travel agents shows that the top destination for Southern Californians this year is San Diego, Spring said. Las Vegas placed second, followed by San Francisco, Yosemite National Park and Catalina Island.

Even with many school districts already in session,

Spring said traffic could be heavy on many area freeways starting Thursday as those without children will likely leave early.

Unlike 2015, when the average price for regular gasoline was \$3.56 a gallon; this year it's dropped to \$2.67, a 25 percent drop in price.

As in years past, the California Highway Patrol and other law enforcement

agencies will be on the lookout this holiday weekend for drunken motorists and other unsafe drivers.

"We urge everyone to make sure they wear their seat belts," said Officer Rolando Tejeda, a spokesman for the California Highway Patrol's Ventura office.

See TRAVEL, 4A



Kaija Schoeld, of Brookings, South Dakota, helps to remove arundo from the bed of the Ventura River. Schoeld and more than 600 incoming California Lutheran University students spent Monday afternoon taking part in their annual community service day, "You Got Served."

CLU students devoted to beautification projects

By Arlene Martinez
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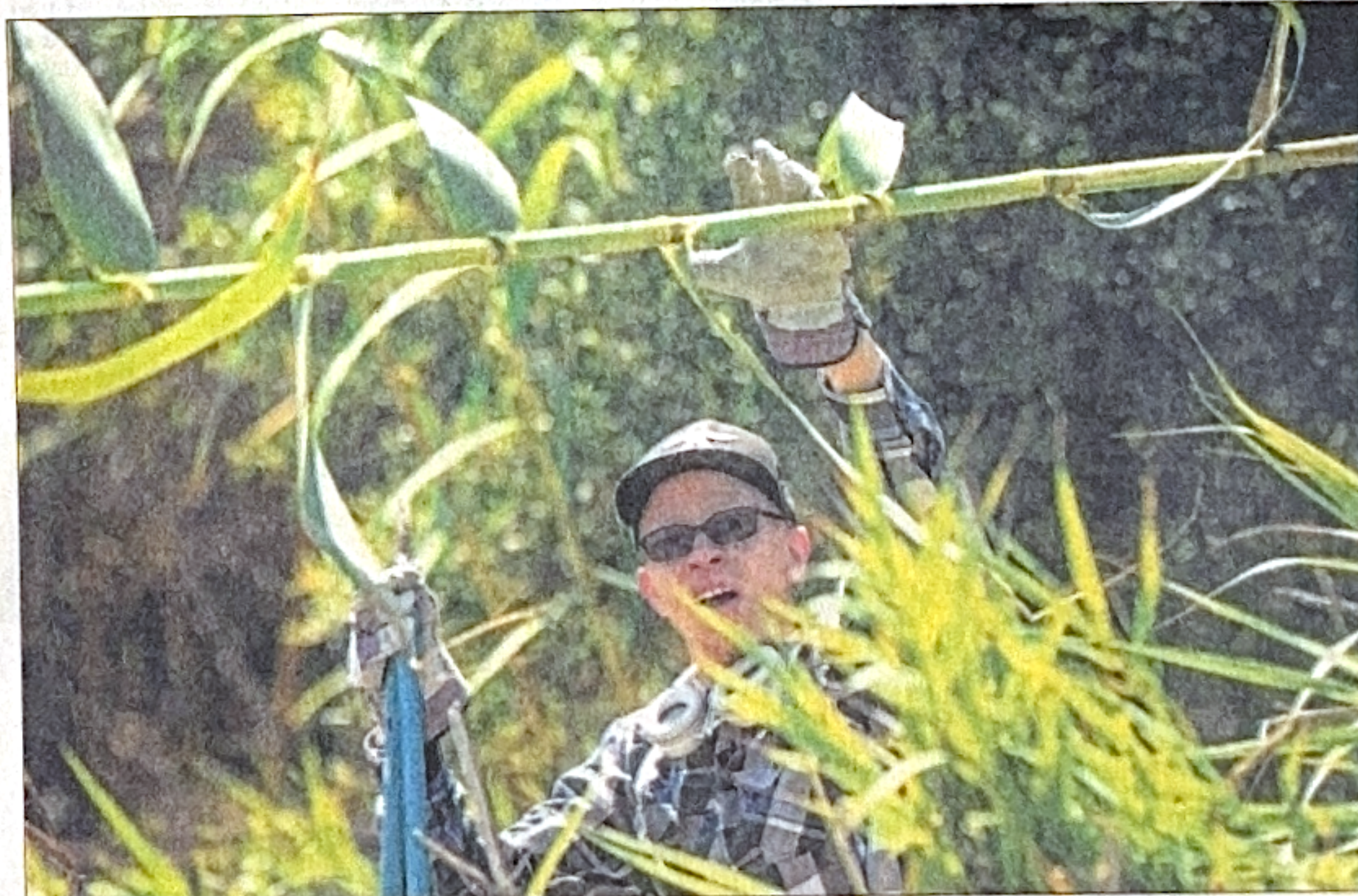
The arundo circling Shannon Martin, a freshman at California Lutheran University, didn't have a chance.

"Die, arundo, die," she called out, using the large shears in her hand to make future mulch of the bamboo-like reed.

"We are chopping down arundo, which is an invasive species. Basically, it's killing all the native plants ... and I believe there's an endangered fish we're trying to save here," Martin explained, trying to remember all the details she and the rest of the incoming class had heard just before heading down to the Ventura River.

They were more than 600 students were part of "You Got Served," a community project started in 2008 that has become a start-of-year tradition for the Thousand Oaks freshmen and transfer students. This is the second year the students worked to clear arundo off a piece of land owned by the land trust, Ventura Hillside Conservancy.

When the conservancy



A.J. Akpodiete, of Santa Clarita, tosses arundo onto a pile. By chopping down the arundo, the CLU students are allowing native plants to grow back on a piece of land owned by Ventura Hillside Conservancy. "You Got Served" is a community project started in 2008 that has become a start-of-year tradition for CLU students.

in 2012 assumed ownership of the property, bordered by the Main Street Bridge and Pacific Ocean in Ventura, the nonnative arundo was thick and high — the perfect cover for elaborate

homeless encampments. Since then, a steady stream of volunteers has removed 6 to 8 acres of the reed, said Dashiell Dunkell, the Hillside's conservation director.

"We've seen a lot of the native vegetation regrowing," he said.

That includes willows, sycamores and other native trees that had been smothered by the

water-guzzling arundo.

A coalition that includes the conservancy hopes the site can one day be turned into a place with walking

See SERVED, 4A

Thousand Oaks boy visits school in Nepal

■ 10-year-old and family help earthquake victims

By Kelsey Stuart
Special to The Star

What began as a Thousand Oaks boy's vision to create a better life for earthquake victims turned into an organization that was able to raise \$5,000 to help to build a school in Nepal.

Over the summer, 10-year-old Akash Pandey traveled with his family to the Himalayan region, saw the school and met some of the children his age who

attend classes there.

For two months, the Pandeyes traveled around Nepal, including the outskirts of Gorkha, the epicenter of the 7.8-magnitude earthquake that killed 9,000 Nepalese last April.

Akash's grandparents and other relatives live in Nepal and lost their homes in the earthquake. That's what prompted the boy to form www.bykids4kidsnepal.org last year with his younger sister Harmony,

in hopes of raising money to help victims.

Before the earthquake, the Gorkha district had 454 schools. Afterward, only 13 percent were left standing.

"School is important, and we wanted to help," Akash said.

Bijiaka Devkota, founder of the Gorkha Foundation, met Akash's mother, JoAnn Pandey, an educational psychologist, during



Deven and JoAnn Pandey, of Thousand Oaks, along with their children Harmony and Akash, hike in Nepal.

See NEPAL, 4A

Crews mostly contain blaze

■ 'It's all looking good,' officer says

By Christian Martinez
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Fire crews continue to make progress against Santa Barbara County's Rey Fire, officials said Monday.

Authorities reported the blaze, now 12 days old, was 78 percent contained as of Monday evening. Authorities also adjusted down the number of acres burned from 33,006 to 32,601, saying they were able to do so because of "more accurate mapping."

"It's all looking good," Pam Bierce, an incident information officer, said on Monday morning. "Crews are holding it back."

Fire personnel will focus their efforts on the northeast corner of the fire Monday after making good progress on containment lines Sunday.

"It's really steep, difficult terrain up there," Bierce said.

Crews will be assisted by helicopter units as needed.

Firefighters will also conduct patrols of the fire's edges in addition to bolstering existing dozer lines along Camino Cielo Ridge and other portions of the fire, authorities said.

Officials said they expect the fire to be fully contained by Wednesday.

The fire broke out Aug. 18 in the White Rock campground in Los Padres National Forest. The campground is located on Paradise Road off Highway 154.

A fire weather watch was in effect Monday, officials said, as temperatures were predicted to be in the mid 90s with winds between 14 and 19 miles per hour expected on the ridges. The fire weather watch could be upgraded to a red-flag warning if winds persist or grow stronger, officials said.

Paradise Road was reopened to the public at 7:30 p.m. Sunday, officials said.

"I'm sure there are a lot of residents and campers excited to get up there," Bierce said.

Painted Cave and Gibraltar roads remain closed to all non residential traffic however, along with East Camino Cielo Road.

"We want to make sure the public is safe," Bierce said.

Due to the progress crews have made, fire personnel numbers have dropped considerably. As of Monday morning, 1,097 personnel were assigned to the Rey Fire effort, down almost 900 since Friday.

Bierce said crews were being made available to respond to other fires.

LOCAL

Voting open for county's hardest worker

Staff reports

Vote for the 2016 Hardest Worker in Ventura County by casting a ballot on vcstar.com.

The winner will be profiled in Colleen Cason's column that runs the Sunday before Labor Day. Some nominees who did not make the finals will be profiled in The Star's Opinion section on that same day.

Here are the finalists in this year's contest: Tanner Linden Akseve, of Port Hueneme, a high school student also on staff at the Santa Barbara Zoo; Michael Bonilla, of Thousand Oaks, who operates an insurance brokerage

firm and teaches small-business survival skills; John Conquest, of Ventura, a tow-truck driver who will respond at all hours and still finds time to care for others; Mary Galbraith, of Ventura, who has turned volunteering at Focus on the Masters into a consuming art form; Joe Guerra, of Oxnard, who drives a delivery truck and volunteers in every aspect of a girls baseball league; Sara Hannah, of Ventura, a supervisor for a string of child care centers who finds time to teach parenting skills; Tammie Helmuth, CEO of a trophy company who pitches in for a trio of charities; Lydia Merrill, of Oxnard, who has

made caregiving her livelihood and her life; Beverly Nickson, of Simi Valley, who revels in raising money for charities despite her own challenges; and William Tipton, of Ventura, who founded and operates a mortuary services and crime scene cleanup business.

To help make the choice, statements summarizing the achievements of these diligent finalists are posted online.

Voting ends at noon Thursday. And only one vote per person is permitted.

To vote, go to <http://www.vcstar.com/about-us/Hardest-Worker-2016.html>.

Public safety briefs

PORT HUENEME

Teen arrested as carjacking suspect

Port Hueneme police said they arrested a 15-year-old male early Monday in connection with a vehicle pursuit through south Oxnard.

The juvenile was arrested sometime after 12:30 a.m. at Johnson Creek Park in the 500 block of Johnson Road.

According to authorities, the Oxnard Police Department received a stolen vehicle report at 12:30 a.m. Monday. The person said the vehicle had been stolen near 7th and 8th streets.

Officials said the Port Hueneme Police Department located the vehicle and pursued it through south Oxnard. The pursuit ended when the teen allegedly crashed into a Johnson Creek Park bench and grill, police said.

The teen was treated at the scene for minor injuries and arrested by Port Hueneme police on suspicion of felony pursuit, grand theft auto, and resisting arrest.

Officials said Oxnard police will investigate the alleged carjacking.

OXNARD

Five arrested during DUI checkpoint

Five people were arrested on suspicion of being under the influence of alcohol or drugs during a sobriety and driver's license checkpoint put on by the California Highway Patrol Ventura Area and the Oxnard Police Department Saturday night in Oxnard.

During the checkpoint, which began Saturday evening and concluded at 3 a.m. Sunday, 643 drivers were screened. Of those 15 were asked to take part in field sobriety tests that led to the five arrests.

Police maintain that sobriety checkpoints are effective tools in helping keep drivers safe.

Funding for this program was provided by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety through the National

Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

THOUSAND OAKS

Police investigate hit-and-run crash

Thousand Oaks police said they were investigating a hit-and-run crash that occurred Sunday evening in Thousand Oaks.

Deputies responded to reports of a collision between a vehicle and a bicyclist at 5 p.m. in the 1400 block of Janss Road.

According to police officials, a male bicyclist and an unidentified driver of a vehicle engaged in a verbal argument after which the bicyclist rode away. Authorities say the driver followed the bicyclist and struck him with the vehicle causing the rider to fall to the ground. The vehicle then left the scene, officials said.

The bicyclist suffered minor leg injuries as a result, authorities said.

Police officials said the incident is being investigated as an assault with a deadly weapon in addition to hit-and-run with injury

by the Thousand Oaks Department's Major Crimes Unit. Both offenses are classified as felonies, authorities said.

Deputies respond to burglary in progress

Ventura County Sheriff's Office officials said deputies responded to a burglary in progress early Monday in Thousand Oaks.

Authorities said the incident was reported at 12:30 a.m. at a Lenscrafters in the 500 block of Moorpark Road.

According to a sheriff's official, a witness reported three men forced their way into the location. Deputies from the Thousand Oaks Police Department responded and found the suspects inside the Lenscrafters. The suspects fled the scene after the deputies arrived, officials said.

Deputies were unable to locate the suspects after a search, authorities said.

Sheriff's officials reported items were taken from the location.

Staff reports

TRAVEL
from 3A

Anyone seeing a motorist whom they suspect is drunk or intoxicated is urged to notify the CHP by calling 911, Tejeda said.

The busy holiday weekend comes as the National Safety Council is projecting 431 traffic-related deaths during the three-day holiday, "the highest number since 2008," Spring said.

Motorists are urged to not only be sober before getting behind the wheel, but to also take their time while on the

Local briefs

SIMI VALLEY

VP candidate to talk at Reagan Library

Gov. Mike Pence, the Republican vice presidential candidate, will speak at the Reagan Library in Simi Valley on Sept. 8.

Pence was elected governor of Indiana in 2012 and took office in January 2013.

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump selected Pence as his running mate in July.

Pence's lecture at the library begins at 10 a.m. Sept. 8 at the library, 40 Presidential Drive in Simi Valley. Tickets are \$65 and include a buffet lunch in the Air Force One Pavilion after the lecture.

Purchase tickets at www.reaganfoundation.org.

Campaigning is not allowed on the library campus. Guests will not be allowed to wear buttons, hats or T-shirts or bring other campaign materials.

Overpass to be named for officer

The Highway 118 First Street overpass in Simi Valley on Wednesday will be named after Michael Clark, the only Simi Valley police officer to die in the line of duty.

The ceremony will begin at 9 a.m. on Town Center Way, east of First Street, police said. Town Center Way will be closed from 7 a.m. to noon.

Residents and patrons of businesses in the area will be detoured around the event by the Simi Valley Police Traffic Bureau.

Clark was killed in 1995 while responding to a report of a suicidal man, Daniel Tuffree, who shot the officer.

Tuffree was later convicted and sentenced to 54 years

in prison.

Assemblyman Scott Wilk, R-Santa Clarita, in February introduced a resolution to name the overpass after Clark. Sen. Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills, is a principal co-author of the measure.

VENTURA COUNTY

Rams exec to speak at CLU breakfast

An executive with the Los Angeles Rams will speak at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in September.

Kevin Demoff, executive vice president of football operations and chief operating officer, will kick off this year's California Lutheran University Corporate Leaders Breakfast Series. The breakfast will be from 7:30 to 9 a.m. Sept. 16 at the library, 40 Presidential Drive, Simi Valley.

Demoff, who orchestrated the football team's move back to Los Angeles from St. Louis this year, plans to talk about business and the NFL. The team, which will start practicing at CLU in September, plans to use its recently-completed training center there for the next couple of years.

Demoff oversees marketing, sales, finance, administration, communication, ticketing and community relations for the Rams. He also oversaw the creation of the Rams Broadcasting Network.

The Sports Business Journal named him one of its "Forty under 40" class members of 2016.

Reservations, which are requested, may be made by contacting Sharon Nelson at smnelso@callutheran.edu. More information is available at callutheran.edu/clb.

Staff reports



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Harmony Pandey, 7, of Thousand Oaks, is flanked by youngsters in one of the classrooms of a new school in Nepal. Her brother, Akash, 10, helped raise money for the school's construction.

NEPAL
from 3A

a teacher training clinic she was running in Nepal. "JoAnn is an expert in education, and when we started talking she told me what her kids had started," Devkota said.

Akash's vision was just what the Gorkha Foundation needed. Created in 2005, the foundation had spent the last decade loading the schools with up-to-date computers, only to have it all destroyed by the quake.

"We helped with initial relief for the people for the first month, and then came together and decided to build 15 schools," Devkota said. "Our main focus was rebuilding high schools, but randomly an elementary school came up and we immediately reached out to the Pandey family."

The elementary school was in the village of Bhirsingh, which means "Steep Horn." It was reachable only by a bumpy eight-hour drive in a four-wheel drive vehicle and then an extra four hours of hiking rough terrain. The total population is 475, most of whom still sleep in shelters of bamboo and tin because their houses were destroyed in the earthquake.

Ninety percent of the village's school was destroyed.

Akash's father, Deven, said that's where their fundraising efforts went. The village now boasts a school with five classrooms, prepped for 150 children, paid for in part with money they'd raised.

On their way to the village, they got a taste of life in Nepal.



Children in the Nepalese village of Bhirsingh dance during a ceremony the night before a ribbon-cutting for a new five-classroom school for 150 children. Akash Pandey, 10, led a fundraising effort for construction.

"We saw water buffalo, cows, chickens and lambs," 7-year-old Harmony recalled about the hike they took to reach the village. "We had to be careful not to touch any sisinu, (stinging nettles), and to watch out for the leeches."

The village greeted them with leis and smiles and welcomed the family with a cultural presentation and dinner. The children delivered heavy backpacks filled with school supplies donated by their own school, Aspen School in Thousand Oaks.

"We slept in one of the bamboo shelters that night, because most of the houses were cracked," Akash said.

He said he had fun playing soccer with the youngsters in the village, using an apple for a ball. And Harmony, he said, enjoyed dancing with the girls.

The next morning the village children gathered around and blessed the Pandey family with more leis and a red vermilion powder they put on their faces as they conducted a

ribbon-cutting for their new school.

"I soon saw that this was a happy place, filled with joy and people that cared a lot about each other," Akash said.

Returning home, the children left with heavy hearts. They said they'd enjoyed a rare opportunity to change lives, and they wanted to stay and do more.

"I truly believe that when empowered at a young age, children can show that acting locally will affect great change globally, which truly inspires adults to follow their lead," said Kathleen Byington, who had taught both Akash and Harmony at Aspen School and who helped to gather school supplies for the Pandey family to take to Nepal.

"When you put kids together, things happen," Deven Pandey said.

Akash and Harmony are putting together a documentary of their travels. Check www.bykids4kids.com for updates or email them at bykids4kids@nepal@gmail.com for more information.



Incoming California Lutheran University students spent Monday afternoon removing arundo from the Ventura River as part of their annual community service day. "You Got Served."

ROB VARELA
THE STAR

SERVED
from 3A

trails and spots to picnic. It would be part of the Ventura River Parkway, a contiguous route that goes from the ocean to Ojai.

But before that happens, it needs more work.

Monday afternoon hundreds of students took to the area around

the Ventura River and did their part.

Katie Shearer, 19, returned to the river for her second straight year. Now a peer adviser, Shearer said it was cool to watch students start connecting how one thing, in this case, arundo, "can have a ripple on the ecosystem."

In past years students have cleared trash and debris from the Ventura

and Santa Clara riverbeds, pulled up invasive ice plants in the Ventura Harbor Wetlands Ecological Reserve and beautified three city parks, a historic site and a community center.



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IN MEDIATION MEAD MOUTH OF THEATRE

DON'T BREATHE (R) 11:00 1:20 3:30

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DON'T BREATHE (R) 11:30 1:50 4:00

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DON'T BREATHE SPANISH DUBBED (R) 11:15

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HANDS OF STONE (R) 11:55 2:25 5:00

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REN-HUN (PG-13) 10:45 1:30 4:15 7:30 9:45

WAR DOGS (R) 11:05 1:45 4:35 7:20 10:05

KUDD AND THE TWO STRINGS (PG) 10:45 1:10

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PETE'S DRAGON (PG) 12:00 2:30 5:05

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SAUSAGE PARTY (R) 10:50 1:00 3:10

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SURGE SQUAD (PG-13) 10:50 1:35 4:20

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JASON BOURNE (PG-13) 7:35 10:20

BAD MOMS (R) 11:10 1:55 4:25

NEVER (PG-13) 7:55 10:10

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SURGE SQUAD (PG-13) 11:00 1:45 4:30 7:10 9:55