

Martin

COUNTY

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Keep Martin Beautiful projects attract almost 2,000 helpers

By Lisa Bolivar
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MARTIN COUNTY – Almost 2,000 people showed up throughout Martin County as part of the annual Keep Martin Beautiful Extreme Martin Makeover challenge.

The projects were part of the Great American Cleanup, a national community improvement program held annually by Keep America Beautiful and coordinated by the group's local chapter, Keep Martin Beautiful.

The challenge, which ran between March 1 and May 31, saw groups and in-

dividuals gather to tackle cleanup jobs including cleaning waterfronts, city spaces and even house makeovers in areas such as East Stuart.

"I think we ended up doing over 50 houses," said Thelma Washington, executive director of the Gertrude Walden Child Care Center in Stuart.

The center has benefited from the Extreme Makeover challenge for three years. It is now a centerpiece for coordinating volunteers who this year went into East Stuart neighborhoods to help rehabilitate properties.

"We did exterior work;

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painting, replaced rotten wood, soffits, lawn cleaning, streets and it just really was an extreme makeover," Washington said. "I remember a boy from one house, he said while he was gone someone came and stole his house; he said it's OK because they came and brought us a new one."

The child's home got painted, a new door and a cleaned yard.

"When he came home he thought it was a new house, so that was a big

change that took place in those four short hours. It was amazing what we could do in four hours with so many people," Washington said.

About 700 people turned out to help in that neighborhood, but overall almost 2,000 volunteered countywide said Rob Ranieri, logistics coordinator for Keep Martin Beautiful. He said the challenge has grown over the years from just a few organizations to the marriage of those organizations with environmentally-minded individuals.

In a way, it has blossomed.

"Basically, we issued a challenge to the community to get involved in some of our scheduled events or to help us to enlist them to create on their own," he said. "The Extreme Martin Makeover has grown, and we were trying to ramp it up another level."

The effort is gaining popularity, Ranieri said, and has grown from a handful of churches pitching in to much more. This year organizations included Habitat for Humanity and Habitat Angels, which is a group of local churches credited with the East Stuart makeover.

GET INVOLVED

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To get involved with Keep Martin Beautiful projects such as the annual Environmental Stewardship Awards Ceremony, International Coastal Cleanup, Great American Cleanup, Adopt-A-Road program, Adopt-A-Street program and other educational and outreach activities, contact them at:

- Facebook www.facebook.com/keepmartinbeautiful, on Twitter at www.twitter.com/kmbmartin or visit www.KeepMartinBeautiful.org.
- Contact KMB by phone at 772-287-5272 or email info@keepmartinbeautiful.org.

NEXT EVENT

Sept. 17: Clean up waterways.