

Green thumbs honor greenbelt

L.B.: Environmental organization plants 6 sycamores at event.

By Karen Robes, Staff Writer

LONG BEACH -- The task at hand seemed so simple.

Shovel dirt, splash water and pat coffeelike dirt with hands and feet to secure six young sycamores to a greenbelt near Wilson High School.

But the act of planting on Wednesday also symbolized something greater: the ongoing efforts and accomplishments of Long Beach's environmental movement.

"I know of no other way to bring a sense of community ... than sycamores," said Don May, president of California Earth Corps.

May spoke to dozens of residents and environmentalists attending the annual greenbelt celebration. The event began in 1999, after the city denied approval for a housing project on the 2.7-acre lot at Eighth Street and Termino Avenue to support the development of land dedicated to habitat restoration.

The Greenbelt Committee, which was formed to promote local natural preservation, helped to turn 11 acres of land into a strip of open green space. The parcel is maintained with the help of the city and volunteers, many of whom live nearby.

Every January, volunteers get together to celebrate the preservation of the space.

"It's a taste of the old Long Beach," said Charles Moore, founder of Algalita Marine Research Foundation. "Many of the plants predate the (city's) discovery."

The event also acknowledged other ecological groups, some which are celebrating big gains in their fight for the environment.

In October, the state Water Resources Control Board granted Algalita Marine \$482,000 toward the study of trash and plastic in the Los Angeles and San Gabriel rivers.

More recently, Friends of Colorado Lagoon received a \$2,000 California Coastal Conservation grant to review the restoration of the lagoon, which connect the greenbelt at Fourth Street and Park Avenue.

"My son will have a place to see trees and bugs," said Jim Clark, president of the Greenbelt Committee. "And hopefully his kids will, too. That's what it's all about."