

PASO'S *Graffiti* ERASERS

By Chuck Desmond

Even though the license plate frames proclaim El Paso de Robles as “*Darn Near Paradise*,” unfortunately we still have our share of those who don't respect their good fortune to live here. People who tag our city with graffiti fall into that category. There simply is no reason for graffiti and it stands out as one of those nuisances that detract from the beauty in our hometown.

Go back to your early physics class and you might remember the truism – “With every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.” And, so it is with graffiti. If it shows up, it has to go away.

Back in 2003, **Marvin Cowley**, a retiree who moved here from Santa Cruz in '93, decided to do something about it. In Santa Cruz, Marvin had volunteered to pick up freeway trash and eradicate graffiti. Marvin said, “California has been really good to me and I wanted to give back.”

Coincidentally, **Carolyn Carter** moved to Paso in 2003 as a retiree. She began walking the river area. After she received a mailbox flier from the Police Department asking to report graffiti, Carolyn ended up regularly calling the PD to report incidents. Then, on a chance meeting at a gym in 2008, Carolyn met Marvin and she asked how she could help. She's been helping ever since.

The work of erasing graffiti used to be handled by city employees

who of course were paid to clean up the graffiti until 2003 when volunteers began helping. Since then, the volunteer **Graffiti Team** has expanded to six members: Diane Coleman, Alicia and Craig Forrester and Bevelina Hardwick are the other four.

Usually two of them respond to graffiti reports five days per week within the Paso Robles city limits. The team's coordination still flows through the Facility Maintenance wing of the Community Services Department. Additionally, the **Graffiti Team** maintains close ties to the Police Department for the purposes of safety, tracking and documentation. Both Marvin and Carolyn share the same thoughts of their association with Paso residents and PD who appreciate their work once they learn about it. The comments range from “Gee, I didn't even know Paso had a graffiti problem – you folks do a great job!” to “We have made so many friends in the PD as well as appreciative residents because of our work. It makes us feel really good about the work we are doing!”

In 2016, the **Graffiti Team** performed 464 cleanups!

All materials are paid for by the City at a cost which means we residents are footing the bill for cleaning up something that shouldn't ever take place. On occasion, a nice **Love** or **Peace** message is graffiti-ed onto a wall and even though the sentiment is genuine, it still has to go away. Research shows that if graffiti is left in place, more of it will soon show up.



Graffiti Clean Up Volunteer, Marvin Cowley



The Graffiti Clean Up Crew. Top row: Craig Forrester, Marvin Cowley. Bottom row: Carolyn Carter, Alicia Forrester, Bevelina Hardwick, and Diane Coleman

To report graffiti, email to GraffitiCleanUp@PRcity.com or call Paso's Facility Maintenance Department at 237-3873.

JUST DON'T DO GRAFFITI!

Pay attention here! A dozen local residents were apprehended in 2016. Here's what happens when you are caught. First, you are arrested and charged with Vandalism. Depending on the amount of damage **and** the place (like a church) that was vandalized, this may be a misdemeanor (under \$400 damage) or a felony (over \$400). Either way, the case goes before the District Attorney in SLO. A misdemeanor is punishable by up to a year in County Jail and/or a fine not to exceed \$1,000. A felony conviction is punishable by up to 16 months in County jail and/or a fine up to \$10,000. If the vandalism is \$10,000 or more, the fine can be up to \$50,000 and jail time. Really – is it worth all that just to damage something that isn't yours? Think, people, think!

On the other side of the coin, yet again, how blessed are we to live in our pueblo with so many caring individuals to clean up the messes caused by those who don't have a clue. Thank you **Graffiti Team!**