

LOCAL NEWS

Clean Wilmington founder awarded home makeover for nearly a decade of volunteer work

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Salvador Lara is usually the one doing the giving.

But on Thursday, the tables were turned on the man who has spent nearly a decade cleaning up alleys and streets littered with garbage in his gritty Wilmington neighborhood.

Los Angeles Councilman Joe Buscaino joined other community leaders to surprise Lara at the San Pedro office of Sharefest, a volunteering organization that hosts regular cleanups and other philanthropic events.

Wedgewood, a Redondo Beach company that specializes in renovating homes, partnered with Sharefest to remodel Lara's home — a gift that's even more



"I need this," Lara said. "I want to thank everyone who helped support Clean Wilmington and support me."

Lately, Lara and his fellow volunteers have been cleaning downtown Wilmington daily starting at 5 a.m., he said. He's been volunteering since 2007 building parks, landscaping grassy areas, cleaning dumped garbage from alleys and otherwise beautifying the community through his organization, Clean Wilmington. A few years ago, he was named Wilmington's honorary mayor.

Lara, 55, quipped that the generous donation means he'll have to "double" his volunteer efforts.

"It's been amazing to watch him blossom since he started Clean Wilmington and has been empowered to be a community hero," said Sharefest Executive Director Chad Mayer. "Nobody's going to argue that he's the right person to get a home makeover because he's given so much time to the community."

Lara was told he was attending a community meeting Thursday morning but was instead led into a room full of local elected leaders as well as Wedgewood and Sharefest officials.

"It was a great moment surprising him," Mayer said. "Everybody else was in on it besides him. He thought he was going to provide a name of a family" to receive the gift.

Wedgewood spokeswoman Leslie Moody said the company relishes the opportunity to help Lara.

"Giving back to our community and helping those in need is a core Wedgewood value," she said. "And a value so obviously shared by Mr. Lara."

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Sandy Mazza previously worked for Southern California News Group as a city reporter covering Carson and Hawthorne and specializing in features about Los Angeles' growing Silicon Beach tech, bioscience, and aerospace sectors.

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