

Coronavirus shakes up annual Sharefest Workday in South Bay, Long Beach



Sharefest's most visible activity comes once a year when hundreds of volunteers fan out for an annual community "work day," sprucing up schools, parks and other areas across the South Bay, Harbor Area and Long Beach. Dodson Middle School in Rancho Palos Verdes had volunteers painting two new murals at the school in addition to landscaping the front of the school at a recent event. Photo By Chuck Bennett

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Each year, more than 2,000 volunteers fan out across the South Bay, Harbor Area and Long Beach for an event called Sharefest Workday and — armed with paint brushes, hammers and rakes — put a shine on their local communities.

But like virtually everything else during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, this year's [Sharefest Workday](#), set for Saturday, May 2, won't happen.

"This would have been our 17th year," said Chad Mayer, executive director of the nonprofit, which has seen its share of Workday challenges. "We've overcome a lot of things through the years, but not the coronavirus."

Planning began for the event, held annually on the first Saturday in May, in November, with organizers lining up sponsors, funding and volunteers.

But by early March, it became clear plans would have to be altered.

"Some of our corporate partners were in line to give \$100,000 donations," Mayer said, "but when everything hit the fan, one of them said they didn't know if they could give \$5,000."

So this year, Sharefest has asked people to pick from among the [Los Angeles Regional Food Bank](#), the [American Red Cross](#) and the [South Bay Auxiliary of Harbor Interfaith Services](#) to volunteer or give donations.

They can also assist the [Sharefest Student Needs Fund](#) to help [continuation high school students](#) stay connected with school. Residents can also send along an encouraging note for a student. Sharefest provides instructors and tutors for these students throughout the year.

As with most nonprofits, Sharefest has struggling through the pandemic and the sudden economic downturn. Some staff members have had to be laid off and the organization cut pay for others, Mayer said.

"We've had to reduce staff expenses across the board," he said. "It's been felt throughout the entire organization."

An annual golf tournament that last year raised \$170,000 for the nonprofit also had to be canceled.

But the organization is still working, he said, providing online lessons for students to keep them connected. The organization's mentors have stayed in touch with the 142 students Sharefest is helping this spring, Mayer said, and have been known to order pizza for families as a way to make sure students attend their lessons, and their parents and other family members have food.

"This is the time to be creative," Mayer said. "We're fighting through this the best we can."

Some projects planned for this year's Workday could be tackled separately later this year, he added. Others may be folded into next year's event.

And Sharefest's five primary sponsors — City Councilman Joe Buscaino, Phillips 66, the Port of Los Angeles, Golden State Water Company and the Leo Buscaglia Foundation — remain onboard.

The organization, meanwhile, would like those who would normally turn out for Workday to help out in the new way as well.

Sharefest wants those folks to post photos on Facebook or Instagram of them "doing the work," with the hashtag #workdayfromafar, Mayer said.

Raising money, after all, will probably remain a big challenge, Mayer added.

"Everyone's just getting slammed," he said. "It's literally day-by-day right now. We're getting out the fire hose, trying to get our bearings."

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