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KEVIN S. CAHILL 3/20/97

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Participating in events such as this will only enhance our Community relations effort.

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Ted Dargan/Post-Dispatch

Residents and volunteers plant a tree Thursday in the Rush City neighborhood of East St. Louis in a campaign to beautify the area. The city's Operation New Spirit helped organize the event.

Rush City Cleanup Gets A Green Light

Workers Plant Tree, Remove Years Of Trash

By Margaret Gillerman
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

"Today is St. Patrick's Day, and some people are drinking green beer and eating green bread," Sister Cecilia Hellmann told a group at a church on Liberty Street in East St. Louis.

"What *we* want to do is turn Rush City green!" she said.

And then they set out to do just that.

She and the others there celebrated Thursday by planting a tree and cleaning up the Rush City neighborhood. Nearly 100 people — many who have lived in the neighborhood for half a century — welcomed the opportunity to spruce up the area.

The group met first at the New Era Missionary Baptist Church before fanning out through the neighborhood of 10 square blocks in the shadow of the Monsanto plant.

"Happy? You talk about happy — I am so happy they're cleaning up," said Lummie Hopkins, 78, who has lived for 53 years in a tidy blue and white bungalow on Liberty. "I could move a mountain today."

"Ooh, look," she said, marveling at the bulldozers that plowed away piles of rubble.

Although the residents kept their homes and yards neat, they live next to weedy lots piled with debris, derelict cars or the rubble of burned-out houses. Many people, they said, would come into the neighborhood under the cover of night and dump garbage illegally.

"There's debris all over Rush City, and it didn't get up and walk here itself," Hopkins said.

In addition to residents, the gathering included a representative from the Monsanto Co., the mayor, workers of Operation New Spirit and students from the University of Dayton in Ohio. The college students were spending their spring vacation as volunteer workers in the city.

The workers loaded dumpsters, tilled gardens and spruced up playground equipment. Bryan Jeffreys, 20, a junior at the University of Dayton, said, "It's a real good time. I wouldn't trade the experience for anything."

Margaret Brosko, 18, a freshman, said: "The hope in their eyes and smiles on the faces tell the whole story."

Anna Slaughter, 87, described the cleanup as "the answer to my prayers."

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