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to "see."

"They can then function

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CONSERVATION

Student starts grassroots group to save the Strands

By Tiffany Sparks
The News

These days shopping malls, hotels, and houses seem to spring up quicker than weeds.

So when Maji Melendez returned to Dana Point in July after a two-year stint in the Navy, he surmised that Strands Beach, like so many other places in the area, would be built out when he returned.

He was wrong. It hadn't been built out. Yet. "I was surprised to find it still intact," the 21-year-old student said.

Now he's working to keep it that way. Melendez recently founded the Dana Point Conservation Group at Saddleback College. Melendez admits the club is in its grassroot stages, adding that its initial goal is to make people aware — particularly youths — of what's happening to the Strands and Headlands areas.

The club's first activity is an "impromptu surf contest" and a "friendly gathering of concerned citizens" beginning 8 a.m.

Saturday. An estimated 50 people are expected to compete in the contest, which will be followed by a gathering to discuss the development and what options people have to protect the area.

Melendez said that he has invited the developer to the gathering, which includes a beach cleanup afterward.

All proceeds benefit the "Save Dana Strands" fund.

Melendez said his concern is triggering awareness in the younger people in the community, who don't go to council or commission meetings. They aren't as informed about changes in the community.

"A lot of people don't know what's going on and there are a lot of different rumors going around," Melendez said. "We want to clarify what's going on."

"The youths, the teenagers — they're going to live here a lot longer than their parents."

Chris Andrews, co-owner of the Killer Dana Surf Shop, which is sponsoring the surf contest, agreed.

"We want to get teenagers

aware of what's going on — they have a voice too," Andrews said. "In the 1960s, when the harbor was built, nobody did anything. Now Strands is like that. We can try to save it."

Resident Toni Gallagher has been campaigning for years as part of the group "Save the Headlands." She herself was unaware of the new group until she started seeing bumper stickers around the city.

"Everyone needs to get involved — people of all ages," Gallagher said. "They're really hitting a pulse point of the community and getting the younger members [involved]."

Although they are separate organizations, "Save the Headlands" and the Dana Point Conservation Group are both sponsoring activities on Saturday. "Save the Headlands" is having a town hall meeting at 1 p.m. at the Youth Dock Facility in the harbor to discuss Headlands' development.

Although the club is a fairly new organization, it's getting a lot of support. Melendez expects membership to total about 60

people.

Melendez decided against making it a non-profit organization with the state because he feels a campus club can expect and benefit from an influx of new blood and energy each semester.

Bumper stickers are available at many surf shops and restaurants in Dana Point and San Clemente. Melendez said that he's received phone calls from as far away as North Hollywood — people who have found memories of Strands and want to see it remain a hangout for a lot of high school students and residents.

"If we keep this, we can keep a bit of history," Melendez said. "This is a piece of Dana Point that we don't want to lose." But, he adds, this isn't about just preserving a popular surfing destination.

"I surf Dana Point, I say that I want to keep it," Melendez said. "I've seen the Navy, I've seen the world, but it's at." For 248-17

