

SEBASTOPOL

Retiree's gifts help restore laguna

By LORI A. CARTER
Staff Writer



Blincoe

Few who pass Emmett Blincoe as he walks along Sebastopol trails each day know the elderly, gray-haired man is largely responsible for one of the most popular parks

in town.

Including a \$200,000 gift that will be announced at tonight's Sebastopol City Council meeting, Blincoe, 71, has donated almost a half million dollars to fund improvement projects at the Laguna de Santa Rosa Park wetlands preserve in northeast Sebastopol.

A retired Bay Area builder who has always loved the outdoors, Blincoe wants the money to further restore the laguna to its natural state as a habitat for nearly 300 species of plants, 200 kinds of birds and 19 different mammals.

For years, the city of Sebastopol used the land — part of a 13-mile wetlands from Rohnert Park to Forestville — as a sewage treatment pond. Now, a trail, park benches and several hundred newly planted trees mark the beginning of Laguna Park.

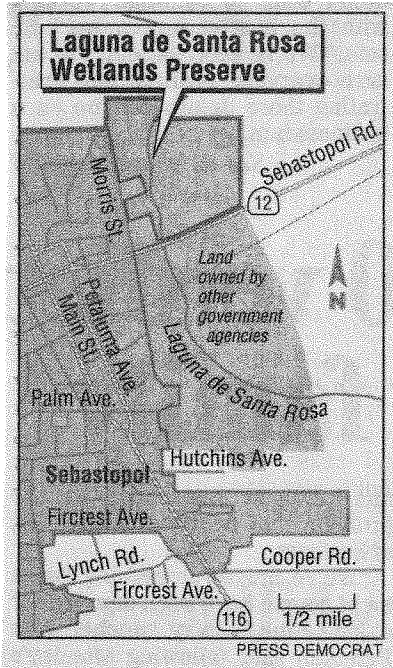
Blincoe, whose first \$200,000 made those improvements possible, wants to see more.

"I expect the funds will be used to further enhance and expand the ongoing efforts to protect and restore the natural beauty of the Laguna de Santa Rosa," Blincoe wrote in a letter to the City Council announcing his donation.

A private man, Blincoe declined to be interviewed for this story. Even city leaders and members of the Laguna Foundation, the group that disburses money to pay for laguna projects, haven't spoken with Blincoe about his generosity.

"He appears to be a truly modest man who wants to make a difference, but doesn't want the public acclaim or notoriety that goes with it," said Kim Cordell, executive director of the Laguna Foundation. "For those of us working for the laguna, he came out of nowhere. It was a surprise, but it

See Laguna, Page B2



looks like a great partnership."

Blincoe's first donation last year paid for construction of a gravel walking path that winds around the old treatment ponds. It was named in honor of Blincoe's late wife, Loretta.

His second gift may fund construction of a floating pedestrian bridge and walking trail on the laguna's east bank, Cordell said. The money also will help the foundation and the city secure grants for further restoration.

Councilman Larry Robinson said Blincoe's donation should serve as an example.

"The laguna is really the biological heart of central Sonoma County," he said. "In two or three generations, the time will come when our grandchildren will be able to swim and fish in the laguna again. It's gifts like this that will make it possible."