

First trout fest celebrates conservation progress

By **Judith Silverstein**
STAFF WRITER

FREMONT — At a folding table in Niles Community Park, Union City resident Larry Dennis tied a bright orange and black trout fly, his hands working nimbly with the small vise and tweezers-like tools of the craft.

His skill was on display at the first Fremont Steelhead Festival and Watershed Awareness Fair held Saturday at the creek-side park to celebrate the progress made toward restoring native steelhead trout and salmon to Alameda Creek.

Sponsored by the Alameda Creek Alliance, the city's Environmental Services Division and the Tri-City Ecology Center, the fair began at 9 a.m. with a 10K

run and 5K run/walk. A dozen tables represented the organizing agencies, the county water district, runners' clubs and environmental groups.

About 130 people participated in the run/walk, said Jeff Miller of the Alameda Creek Alliance. An estimated 300 people attended the day's festivities.

The event marks a momentous change in environmental management that promises to bring steelhead trout and wild salmon back to Alameda Creek. Local agencies have agreed to remove dams and provide fish ladders on barriers the groups say have been preventing the fish from reaching their spawning grounds in Sunol Regional Park.

The agencies — which in-



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Doug Graver wears a hat decorated with rainbow trout to show his support for the cause at the Fremont Steelhead Festival.

changes by 2003.

Miller said the event was to educate as well as celebrate.

"We figure a lot of people use the creek for recreation and saw

clude the Alameda County Flood Control District, the Alameda County Water District, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, the East Bay Regional Park District, and PG&E — have agreed to make the

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a chance to educate them about the potential for restoration and the dangers of development," he said.

Twelve-year-old Darren Drabin, a sixth grade student at Holy Spirit School in Fremont, came for a school project.

"We pulled endangered species from a bag, and I drew steelhead," he said.

Others emphasized the chance to run in a place they loved.

"We train along the creek," said Kitty Miller of Fremont, who came with her running partner Susan Perez. "It's an amazing run. You can go through three cities out to the Bay. If you time it right, you can see the sun rise over Mission Peak."

And some were attracted by the barbecued ribs — decidedly un-granola fare — being sold by a Niles eatery. But few were unaware of the cause. Anthony Rodriguez of Hayward, finishing up his run, said "I came to help save the fish. I've got grandkids who are coming out here."

Twelve-year-old Montessorri Ceepers environmental club member Carly Lewis agreed.



ANITA CHU — Staff

Union City resident Larry Dennis of the Mission Peak Fly Anglers gives a fly-tying demonstration at the first annual Fremont Steelhead Festival and Watershed Awareness Fair held Saturday in Niles Community Park.

"People need to know that when you dump things down storm drains it gets in the creek and the Bay."

The Alameda Creek Alliance has been working to restore native steelhead trout to the creek since 1997, when the species was placed on the threatened list.

Muller says the group's efforts

begin with hand-carrying the steelhead they found past the barriers and soon turned into an organized campaign. But efforts go way back.

"Local fishermen have been hand-carrying the fish since the 70s. Fish and game and local water districts didn't believe steelhead still existed in the creek," he said.