

## MORE THAN 100 VOLUNTEERS



Neal Helvy digs up a wisteria vine during a cleanup effort Saturday near Cleveland Park organized by the **Trees Coalition** and Spartanburg Green Congregations.

# Faith groups join to clear overgrowth

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Volunteers from Spartanburg's interfaith community helped clear invasive plants from an overgrown area near the northern end of Cleveland Park on Saturday.

More than 100 people spent part of the morning and afternoon getting rid of kudzu, wisteria vines, English ivy and mimosa trees that had covered a creek behind some apartments near Cleveland Park and behind Vital Federal Credit Union.

The cleanup was organized by Spartanburg's **Trees Coalition** and Green Congregations, an interfaith group focused on environmental concerns.

John Simmons, a member of Green Congregations, said the event was an opportunity



Students work together to take a load of vines to a waste pile. [JOHN BYRUM PHOTOS/SPARTANBURG HERALD-JOURNAL]

for people of all faiths to join in a common goal of keeping Spartanburg's parks and interchanges clean.

"It's a way for the participants in the Green Congregations to get their hands on some stuff rather than just

sitting around talking about it," Simmons said. "It's a way to practice your faith instead of just singing and praying on Sunday morning. It's also a way to fellowship."

SEE VOLUNTEER, B3



**Zach Blackwood and Chris Miller work on removing an invasive tree.** [JOHN BYRUM/SPARTANBURG HERALD-JOURNAL]

## **VOLUNTEER**

**Continued from B1**

Will Manello, 11, and Ruben Falcon, 10, volunteered Saturday as part of their service hours for the Pine Street Elementary School Beta Club.

The two boys helped carry branches to a large pile next to the pond at Cleveland Park. Both felt Saturday's cleanup was a way to show pride in the city.

"We want a really good

looking city and space," Will said. "We want it to look nice."

As gray clouds loomed in the distance, volunteers cut up trees and cleared brush from areas of thick overgrowth. Charles McKenzie of Spartanburg said he got involved as a way to be active and help with the beautification of the city.

McKenzie said he met Newt Hardie with the Trees Coalition when he joined the Spartanburg Men's Garden Club, and Hardie told him

about what the group was doing. McKenzie said he wanted to be part of the effort.

"When you drive through and look at the interchanges, if they're all overgrown with invasive plants, it just causes the surroundings in the city to look bad," McKenzie said. "When we cleaned up some of these areas like this, it helps people feel better about the city and makes other people who see us doing this work want to be part of it as well."