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 Lake Merritt Institute
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THE LAKE MERRITT
INSTITUTE AN URBAN RUNOFF AND
 WATERSHED RESEARCH CENTER

TIDINGS
APRIL 2009

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**February Rain Brings
 Increased Trash Levels
 at the Lake**

By Richard Bailey, Executive Director, Lake Merritt Institute

Although January rainfall and trash levels were below normal, the rains returned in February. We had 17 days of rain during the month, and our gauge at the Lake recorded 6.25 inches. With the water came trash — trash from the streets, trash from the parking lots and trash from sidewalks. Down the storm drains it flowed, ultimately emptying into Lake Merritt. Trash from all 4,650 acres of the watershed washed into our little 140-acre tidal lagoon. It was a mess.

Most of the debris was plastic — all kinds of plastic. There were plastic bottles, plastic bags, Styrofoam plastic and plastic toys. Mixed in were cigarette butts, paper cups, cans, leaves and branches.

The fountains clogged up and stopped flowing. The trash barrier at 18th Street broke. The Claremont Country Club pond at Pleasant Valley and Broadway overflowed, sending gobs of duckweed down Glen Echo creek and into the Lake (one nearsighted fellow reported it was an oil spill).

There to greet the mess were volunteers and staff of the Institute. The volunteers included students from Laney College, earning extra credit for their biology class, and students from the Piedmont High Key Club who did a video on the stuff. Cleanups were held five days a week and 4,840 pounds of the bad stuff were taken to the transfer

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February's strong rains broke the trash barrier at 18th Street and trash is believed to have clogged fountains.

February Trash, Cont'd

station in our truck. Our regular volunteers came on Tuesday and others worked the remaining weekdays. Also volunteering were members of "Hands On," a Bay Area organization. The sixth grade from St. Paul's School came twice and holy people from the Order of Mercy also worked hard.



Television set pulled out of the Lake during cleanup

On the last day of the month, we pulled a vacuum cleaner out of the Lake and earlier we removed a full-sized recycling container.

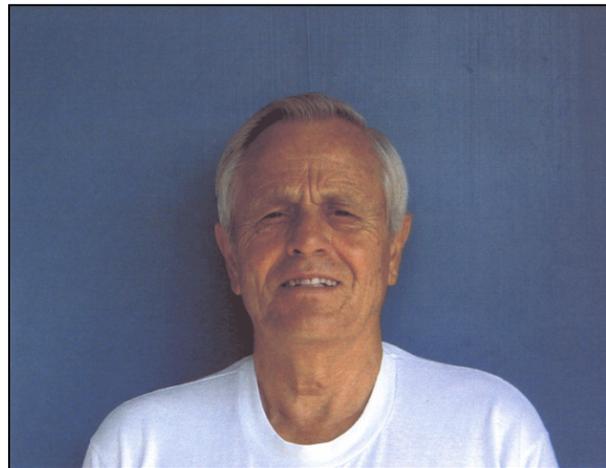
In an otherwise dry year, February rainfall brought us back to normal. The eleven-year average of trash removed from the Lake for February is 5,893 pounds. So, all in all, it was another day at the office, but it didn't seem like it.

Volunteer John Mayer Works to Preserve the Jewel of Oakland

By Sarah Arvidson

"I like to call Lake Merritt the jewel of Oakland," proclaimed John Mayer, a retiree who has been helping to beautify the Lake for close to twenty years by picking up other people's trash. Mayer's dedication to Lake Merritt stems from his commitment to community, his love for the beauty of the Lake and the fact that the view from the fourteenth floor of his condominium complex is Lake Merritt. "It is pretty much my front yard," said Mayer.

Mayer volunteers for approximately four hours each and every Tuesday, mostly helping to pick up garbage from the 12th Street overpass all the way to Madison. Taking pride in Lake Merritt's status as the first wildlife refuge in the State of California, Mayer enjoys being able to contribute to its continued success.



John Mayer, Cleaner of Lake Merritt

He has seen the Lake change dramatically since the Lake Merritt Institute took over its maintenance. According to Mayer, the Institute has done a fantastic job of maintaining the Lake and reaching out to the community to recruit volunteers.

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Volunteer, Cont'd

Lake Merritt volunteers are dedicated to the cause. This group of folks have been working to assist with maintaining the Lake for years. For Mayer, the enjoyment of being able to see the different migratory birds that visit the Lake throughout the year is priceless. He has also made some lifelong friends, including Dr. Bailey who runs the Lake Merritt Institute.

Finally, as a reminder to residents and visitors who also enjoy the natural beauty in an urban setting, you don't need to commit time to volunteering in order to keep the Lake a beautiful place. As Mayer points out, "If you're walking around the Lake and you see some trash, simply pick it up!"

Contributors Wanted

Are you interested in writing and/or contributing articles to Tidings? If so, please send an e-mail and suggested topic ideas to Dr. Bailey at the Lake Merritt Institute: Imi@netwiz.net

Donations Needed

The Lake Merritt Institute is seeking donations, which help us to maintain the quality of the Lake. It's worth a tax write-off!

Advertising Space

Advertise in Tidings! Ad space is available each month at a cost of \$75 for a 3.5" x 2.25" ad. Please email Dr. Bailey at Imi@netwiz.net for additional information or if you would like to place an ad.

Lake Merritt History Facts

- 1884** By this date, water quality problems had become acute, since 90 percent of the City's sewage was deposited in the north arms of the lake.
- 1898** The lake was branded as a cesspool, an eyesore and a menace to public health. Boaters complained of a thick scum which prevented good sailing. Improvement was still a subject of controversy.
- 1907** Oakland electorate approved a bond issue of nearly \$1 million for park lands, the greater part for property adjoining the lake.
- 1907** Mayor Frank Mott procured the funds and authority to dredge the lake north of the bridge and use the dredge spoil to fill in the mud flats around 12th Street.
- 1909** State of California conveyed ownership of the acreage covered by the wildlife refuge to the City of Oakland. Soon after, the channel was dredged and widened and homes constructed on the streets created by the reclamation program.
- 1909** An independent water supply was created for Lakeside Park at a cost of \$10,000. Two 12-inch wells were drilled, one to a depth of 150 feet and the other to 175 feet. Two centrifugal pumps, able to supply 700 gallons per minute, were installed in connection with a 250,000-gallon reservoir.
- 1914** Municipal Boathouse opened at a cost of \$35,000 and was a financial success beyond all expectations of the City officials. They considered the recreation activities thus realized as the big feature, with the revenue-producing activities to be secondary.