

The Lake Merritt Institute

And CENTER FOR URBAN RUNOFF AND WATERSHED RESEARCH

568 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610; 510/238-2290; lmi@netwiz.net; www.lakemerrittinstitute.org

VOLUME XI

"TIDINGS" - MAY, 2006

ISSUE V

CITY DECIDES TO HIRE CONSULTANT FOR DD WATER QUALITY: Overwhelmed by the variety of devices that might be able to reduce trash and improve oxygen conditions in Lake Merritt, the multi-agency Water Quality Technical Committee will be hiring a consultant firm to further study the issue. A company with an on-call contract will be chosen for what is expected to be a one year or less study. Included in the analysis will be the proposed aeration mixing system (under study for the last two years) various storm drain filter systems, solar powered mixing pumps, floating islands and other technology considered or proposed. Their report will be used to decide how to spend Measure DD funds for water quality over the next several years.

NEEDED: AN ECONOMIC STUDY ON THE VALUE OF GONDOLA SERVICE: *Calling all economists...* Considering how many photographs of “Gondola Servizio” were and still are used on City of Oakland publicity, what is the financial worth of this now dormant enterprise to the city? Look on the city website, in many magazines & newspapers, in news broadcasts and in city promotional material where you will see images of the graceful gondola gliding across Lake Merritt. With Oakland still struggling to improve its “image” and attract new residents, the presence of this unique service has been widely used to create a “feel good” atmosphere about our town. Can the value of this publicity be measured?



This image appears on the City of Oakland's website. What is the value of having gondolas in Oakland?

Professional sports teams are said to be important to a city's image, and their logos are widely used in advertising. People say “we can't afford to lose the (fill in the blank team here).” We're not economists, but I'll bet there are some out there (in the City's Economic Development Office?) who assign a financial value to having such a team in a city. In the same manner, isn't the image of a romantic gondola at sunset worth something to Oakland? And if scarcity begets value, where else nearby can you have such an experience, and what does that add to the equation? Included in the study could be a comparison to other services subsidized by the City.

Oakland lost Gondola Servizio to Florida because the company could not make a profit here. But given the number of organizations the City subsidizes for the betterment of Oakland, why not subsidize something that it promotes so heavily? We subsidize transit systems, dairy farmers and many other ventures: Why not gondola service? Perhaps if someone calculated the financial value of this image, the City could find a way to bring it back. If any students or professors are interested, please contact the Institute. We will subsidize the study.

EARTH DAY A SUCCESS: More than 90 volunteers showed up at Lake Merritt on Earth Day this year. They cleaned the entire shoreline, scraped/washed/painted two aeration fountains, ate pizza and had a good time. Starbucks brought coffee and goodies, which were enjoyed by all including City Council President Ignacio de la Fuente. The Cantonese-Speaking Citizens Academy alumni attended, as well as other groups and many individuals.



LMI worker David Coy helps out a volunteer.



A family paints the Bandstand Fountain.

MUSKRAT MAKES AN APPEARANCE: April 24th, 2006. Believe it or not, a small muskrat was observed busily munching away on vegetation along the bulkhead wall about 50 yards from the inlet/outlet channel. Just yards away from busy traffic on Lakeshore Avenue, it didn't even shy away as folks leaned over to take its picture with cell phone cameras. "It probably came in the channel" said

naturalist director Stephanie Benevidez. They are known to live in brackish marshes, and this one could have made it along the Bay from points south, where they are known to live. As the Lake gets saltier, it is unlikely to stay, but...who knows? After all, this is a wildlife refuge.

PEOPLE OF LAKE MERRITT – A DOCUMENTARY BY PAUL GINOCCHIO: Recently seen for sale at the Grand Lake Neighborhood Center is a ten minute DVD featuring three of our favorite people at the Lake. James the saxophone player, Peter the artist and Angelino the gondolier are featured. The video shows the beauty and diversity of Oakland through personal portraits of three people who have developed unique relationships with Lake Merritt. Their thoughts about the Lake and why they do what they do are recorded for posterity.

Free DVD for New LMI Members: New members joining at the \$50 level will receive a free copy of this tribute to our Lake and its people. What a great gift idea!

FACTS ABOUT LITTER – News from Down Under: "The single most common litter item in Australia is the cigarette butt. Cigarette butts make up half of the litter... ." This information can be

found at www.epa.nsw.gov.au/litter/factsaboutlitter. But as those of us who clean Lake Merritt can attest, its much the same here. When you consider that these butts can take up to 5 years to break down (especially the filters) and that other types of litter take longer, up to several decades, we've got a problem. A problem with how an area looks (which affects real estate values); a problem with water quality (such as a decrease in oxygen levels as they decay) and costs in public services (huge sums are spent to clean up litter). How much is spent would make another interesting economic study.



Keep Haltom City (TX) Beautiful entered the Buttmobile into the Houston Art Car Parade where 250,000 spectators saw that cigarette butts are litter, too! The Buttmobile is covered with 20,000 cigarette butts that KHCB collected from city streets. What creative ideas do YOU have for reducing cigarette litter in YOUR community?

What to Do? According to the website, over 80% of smokers said they would bin their butts if suitable bins were available (three key areas for more bins were alongside every ordinary litter bin, at entrances to large city buildings and at bus stops). This would require special, fire-proof containers, which are commonly

available and not that expensive. Perhaps you've seen the ones that look like a tall gourd with a hole in the top. What we need is some philanthropist to donate funds for their purchase and placement around Lake Merritt.

CLOGGED STORM DRAIN CLOSSES I-80: Think litter and the storm drains it clogs are just minor problems? Think again. For 2 hours during one of our recent deluges Interstate 80 was closed because of flooding due to storm drains clogged with debris. How much did that cost in terms of time and money? How many people sat there for hours because of jerks who throw trash out car windows? People who litter are not just careless; they cost us time and money!

KEEP OAKLAND BEAUTIFUL TO RENOVATE LAKEVIEW SCHOOL GARDENS: Why is the soil turned over and barren on the hill across from the Grand Lake Theater? And what is being built at the bottom of the hill along Grand Avenue by the I-580 ramp? It's the "Keep America Beautiful – Great America Cleanup Project" sponsored by *Keep Oakland Beautiful (KOB)* a program of the Oakland Public Works Agency. The project is managed by KOB board member Gordon Piper with assistance from landscape designers Danielle Ziolkowski & Salvador Davila, the Jeff Anhorn Nursery, school officials, volunteers from the Kiwanis Circle K Club & UC Berkeley, the Graham Tree Service and the Jackson & Perkins company who donated 200 rose plants. When finished it will include a much needed retaining wall at the bottom to prevent soil from washing out onto the sidewalk, street and thereby into Lake Merritt. Funding is being provided by the Scotts Miracle Gro company in the form of \$5,000 in cash plus \$2,000 in garden products. This has been awarded to *KOB* by Keep America Beautiful, the parent organization. Also being considered are new textbooks from the National Gardening Association to provide Lakeview teachers help in teaching math skills.

Volunteer days have been scheduled (for you?) to help on Saturday, May 6th from 8 am to 4 pm and Sunday, May 7th from 8 am to noon. Help will be needed for planting, watering, et cetera. Stop by if you can and help out with this much needed project to "Keep Oakland Beautiful."

MONTHLY BIRD REPORT – By Correspondent Hilary Powers.

Today On The Lake: Less variety, more quality.... The peak moment was watching a pair of Nuttall's Woodpeckers (smallish woodpeckers with black and white bars running crosswise down the back) chasing each other through the little pollarded trees between the nature center and the kiddie park, right beside the lakeside path. A novel sight - especially as both birds were male: they had red caps well back on the head, where a female would be all black and white.

Out on the islands, the Double-Crested Cormorants are raising a bumper crop of black snaky babies, and both the Great Egrets and the Snowy Egrets (yellow beaks and black beaks respectively) are dancing up a storm. This is a must-see - especially with binoculars to show the details: Long white plumes from between the shoulder blades (and on the head, for the Snowies) rise up a coupla feet, making the birds look like dandelion puffs. Interspecies moment: a pair of Snowies were unfortunate enough to have a pair of Black-Crowned Night Herons (gray sides, black head with a pair of long white plumes trailing down the back and red, red eyes) nesting about three feet away around the blackberry bush. The egrets were puffed way up, looking as large as possible and giving the night herons the hairy eyeball; the herons were staring back so hard you could practically see the thought balloon: "Oh, boy, eggs on the menu for lunch!" (Night herons are ferocious nest robbers.)



Hey mom, what's in there?

Actually, this gosling is just trying to keep warm under mom's wing.

Several dozen goslings are hatched at the Lake each spring, but they are not the reason that goose numbers rise from several hundred to near 2,000 in June & July. That increase is due to birds flying in here to molt.

The Ross's Goose (small, snow-white, with a red bill and red legs) is still around; it came in for a landing near the kiddie park, but a coupla Crows ran it off. One of the Canada Goose couples had a pair of goslings in tow. Cute-cute-cute.... (And one of the park people reported seeing a Greater White-Fronted Goose - colored like a domestic Greylag, but without the super-fat rear end - earlier in the day, but we missed it.)

Other than that, most of the usual suspects, plus a young Hooded Oriole (pale gold, with a black face and bib) in the trees near Bellevue and Perkins. A few laggard Greater Scaup (black and white ducks with gray backs) were chasing handouts, and the Ruddy Ducks (some of the males with full chestnut backs and bright blue bills) were still around. No day at Lake Merritt is a bad day for birding, but now through May you'll see some amazing sights....

This edition of "Tidings" was published entirely with private funding donated to the Lake Merritt Institute. To contribute to the Lake Merritt Institute, contact us at 510-238-2290 or 568 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610.

