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### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Lake Merritt Institute Contract Is Up for Renewal	1
Oxygen Levels Are Important for Sustaining Life in Lake Merritt	2
Lake Merritt History	3

## Lake Merritt Institute Contract Is Up for Renewal

By Richard Bailey, Executive Director, Lake Merritt Institute

The current Lake Merritt Institute (LMI) contract with the City of Oakland to provide clean lake services (trash removal, fountain maintenance, educational presentations, technical input and other lake-related tasks) will end on June 30. Included in the contract is a provision for a two-year extension, which is currently being recommended by city staff.

The LMI contract includes: 1) field activities such as trash/debris pickup and maintenance of the aeration fountains and litter booms, 2) volunteer coordination for trash removal activities, 3) public outreach and stewardship activities such as educational presentations to schools and local organizations and maintenance of Lake Merritt bulletin boards, and 4) participation in Lake Merritt Water Quality Technical Committee meetings.

The use of dedicated, trained volunteers is a very cost-effective way of keeping Lake Merritt clean. As noted in a recent Public Works Agency memo, "Park volunteers are needed for basic maintenance." (Memo to Dan Lindheim: Facilitate Discussion of Priorities for FY 2009-11; PW Committee, March 24, 2009)



*Students volunteer to help keep Lake Merritt clean*

LMI looks forward to continuing its relationship with the City of Oakland to coordinate volunteer cleanup and beautification efforts during these difficult economic times.

### A Special Thank You

Kudos to Piedmont High Key Club members who presented the Institute with a check for \$1,000 to continue our work at the Lake. This is the same group that produced the video "Urban Runoff at Lake Merritt" which can be viewed at our Web site. Not only do they excel at raising funds and making videos, Key Club members also volunteered and painted badly rusted portions of our truck on Earth Day. Thanks!

## Oxygen Levels Are Important for Sustaining Life in Lake Merritt

By Sarah Arvidson

In 1999, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency deemed the health of Lake Merritt to be impaired due to high levels of trash and low levels of oxygen. The data collected by various agencies and public institutions over the last 10 to 15 years suggests that low oxygen levels can be found mostly at the Lake's bottom and are due to both natural and human interference.

Naturally, oxygen levels increase and decrease with season changes and weather. For example, in August and September, when the widgeon grass goes through a die-off cycle, the decomposition of plant matter causes respiration, which depletes oxygen in the water. Levels during the daylight hours, especially in the mid-day sun, increase in the Lake because photosynthetic activity is at its highest.

Human interference in oxygen levels can be caused by a multitude of factors.

Trash pollution, urban runoff and restrictions on tidal circulation due to flood prevention all contribute to a decrease of oxygen in the Lake. Removing trash and keeping up with the regular harvesting of widgeon grass and algae work to counteract these factors.

Other solutions include installation of storm drain filters which remove organic matter from urban runoff before it reaches the Lake. Also, conducting regular water testing and being mindful of the tide gate operations for flood control will also help to keep oxygen at an average level.

Oxygen is required to support the array of plant and animal life found at Lake Merritt. Daily and seasonal variations are a natural part of the process and work to sustain the health of the Lake. The good news is that throughout most of the year, the data collected suggests that the surface water in Lake Merritt contains average levels of oxygen.



*A mother duck and her ducklings are the Lake's newest residents*

### 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](mailto: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!



*A bagpiper playing on the shores of the Lake*

### 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](mailto:Imi@netwiz.net) for additional information or if you would like to place an ad.

## Lake Merritt History Facts

- 1915** First recorded oil spill problem in Lake Merritt. It was caused by oil leaking from vessels docked in the estuary with the oil carried into the Lake by the tide. The shrubbery lining the banks was ruined and the surfaces were converted into a fire hazard. The substance was absorbed by the feathers of the waterfowl so they couldn't fly. Because the birds were in a helpless condition, food was provided to them, and this tamed them to the degree that many made the Lake their permanent home.
- 1920** A bandstand was constructed at a cost of \$55,000. Regular Sunday afternoon concerts were inaugurated with the season running from April to October. The Lake was again dredged and part of the spoil was used to create the first small island in the Lake to be used for a duck haven.
- 1923** Lake Merritt Model Yacht Club was established.
- 1923** Lake Merritt bowling greens were opened.
- 1925** Federal government declared Lake Merritt an official banding station in order to secure data on the habits and breeding grounds of different birds. One of the Lake's outstanding aesthetic features, the beautiful "necklace of lights," was completed at a cost of \$73,000. The lights, 126 in all, 125 feet apart, constituted the permanent portion of the necklace and produced an effect of an unbroken and gracefully curving line of uninterrupted illumination.
- 1926** State Fish and Game Commission surveyed the conditions of the Lake because it had become "notoriously" bad.

## Tidings

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City of Oakland.

To contribute to the Lake  
Merritt Institute, contact  
us at  
(510) 238-2290  
or at 568 Bellevue Avenue  
Oakland CA 94610



*The New Zealand Tea Tree, an iconic tree  
found at Lake Merritt*

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*We're on the Web!*

*Visit us at:*

[www.lakemerrittinstitute.org](http://www.lakemerrittinstitute.org)

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**Volunteer Name**  
**Street Address**  
**City, ST ZIP Code**