NEW INSTRUCTIVE SIGNS GRACE THE SHORELINE

Four beautiful, informative signs are now available for your viewing pleasure along the shoreline of Lake Merritt. Installed as part of the “Once Upon a Time, Happily Ever After” Project, these pieces of art are scheduled to be only temporary, but we hope they will find a permanent home here to delight and educate current and future visitors to our little lagoon. You may see them at the columns structure by El Embarcadero; by the overlook at the mouth of Glen Echo Creek (Grand & Harrison streets); between the Cameron Stanford House and the Lake Chalet; and near the 18th Street platform along Lakeshore Avenue.

Kudos to Scott Oliver for his vision, artistic talent, success in coordinating all necessary approvals and choice of ideal themes for presentation. Other components of the project are T-shirts, an audio tour and installation of storm drain outlet markers.
KEEP THOSE STORM DRAIN INLETS CLEAN!
Although the raindrops have been tardy, we all know that, eventually, they will arrive. And when they do it is up to us to be sure that their escape routes are not blocked. Many of them run downhill to the nearest storm drain inlet, where they dive in under the street, gather together and flow down to the nearest creek, lake or bay and ocean. But if their entrance to the storm drain is blocked, they get mad and keep on going, perhaps to your driveway, house or anywhere else lower in elevation. There is no stopping these raindrops!

So, don’t let leaves, litterbug leavings or plastic clog up the drain inlets. Scoop up the offending cloggers and toss them in the trash. It’s easy, and takes less than a minute, which is a lot less time than it takes to clean up a flooded whatever.

CLIMATE CORNER – How much rain can fall?
We’ve all heard about the drought in Texas, but climate change is mainly about a warmer atmosphere, which can hold more water. So if it didn’t rain in Texas, where is the extra rain going? And why?

Thailand: Remember the floods last year? Bill McKibben wrote the introduction to a book (I’m With the Bears) in which he stated that the mountains above that country - which normally receive about 3 feet of rain per year - were hit by an astonishing 12 feet or rain in a week. The result:

- Flooding began in July and continued into December
- The World Bank estimated damages at $45 billion
- 790 people died
- The floods rank as the world’s fourth costliest disaster, after the 2011 Earthquake and Tsunami in Japan, the 1995 Kobe earthquake and Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Meanwhile in El Salvador, a tropical depression and ocean temperatures that were 0.5 – 1.0°C above average during the first half of October caused 4.96 feet of rain (almost 60 inches) to fall in ten days. Landslides and extreme flooding killed 105 people and inundated parts of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

Can you imagine what that much rain would do if it hit the central Sierras, or Lake Merritt?
BIRD COLUMN
In the midst of a borderline-rainy week, Lake Merritt served up a perfectly beautiful morning for the fourth-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon walk: clear and still and warm. And the birds were out in droves — 53 kinds in all, including a drake that was a cross between a Barrow's Goldeneye and a Common Goldeneye, as shown by having a teardrop-shaped white cheek spot instead of the crescent of one side or the pure circle of the other. The numbers of scaup — the black and white ducks with brindled gray backs — seemed way down; merely lots of them, but not the huge rafts to be expected at the sheltered end of the lake. We saw all the regular winter migrants and almost all the singleton visitors, including the male Redhead (identifiable by the ducky blue bill in place of the black ski jump worn by the equally red-headed Canvasbacks), but not the Tufted Duck, who was keeping his black back and little pony-tail right out of sight.

We got lovely looks at a couple of Red-tailed Hawks, one with a truly blazing red tail — something that despite the name they don't all have — and a Cooper's Hawk, probably one of the resident breeding pair, though the nest is well hidden. Other highlights from Lakeside Park included a Red-breasted Nuthatch creeping happily down a tree trunk, a Hutton's Vireo (looking just like a Ruby-crowned Kinglet but moving too slowly), and a wide-eyed Hermit Thrush, one of the cutest birds ever to hop along the ground.

All in all, another good day at Lake Merritt, where every day is a good day....

TRASH AT RECORD LOW FOR DECEMBER
A record low amount of trash for December, only 1,000 pounds, was removed from Lake Merritt in 2011. The previous low had been 1,580 pounds in December, 2000; and the average for 1998 – 2009 is 5,432 pounds. Reasons for the new low are (obviously) the scant amount of rainfall — only 0.04 inches were recorded at our gage in that month and (less obviously) the fact that the 12th Street beach and the shoreline between 18th Street and 12th Street were closed to cleaning due to construction.

Time, more rain and the re-opening of the new beach to cleaning (not due until late 2012) will likely increase the amount of trash we gather. However, two new storm drain filters to be installed at the new bridge will trap some of it before it gets to the Lake.

RECENT SCENES FROM THE LAKE
AQUAPIED AGAIN
It appeared on a Monday morning, January 30th. Like it’s predecessor, the barge was a message to the world, with a background of Lake Merritt. This version was kind of cute, with a roof reminiscent of an American flag, a white picket fence, window flower boxes and a mailbox (#99). The back wall held a message encouraging people to provide housing for the homeless and the number of foreclosed homes in the United States. Lloyd, one of our Tuesday volunteers and a rower had brief conversations with the occupants, deeming them to be non-violent and courteous.

Alas it was not to last. By Thursday it had been removed and smashed to smithereens by a city bulldozer. A cold, salt water, wildlife refuge is not the place for people to remain.

FOUNTAINS DOWN, UP, DOWN
Water stopped flowing from the Glen Echo fountain in early January. The culprit was a failed motor lead which caused the motor to run hot (20 amps!). It was removed, shipped to it’s mid-west factory home, fixed and returned to be installed early this month. But then the Bandstand aeration fountain quit. Hey, wait, we just fixed the lights. What’s wrong now? This time the nozzle shaft broke, which messed up the propeller, which also failed (see photo). When salt water and metal meet, salt eventually wins. So now it’s back to the shipping store. As for the spare motor, it has a leak, but fear not, for the Embarcadero, Glen Echo and 18th St. units are perking along. So if you need oxygen during your Lake Merritt swim, just go on over to one of those aerators. We hope to get the Bandstand fountain running in March.

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