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# ***THE TIDINGS***

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*“The Tidings” is a publication of the Lake Merritt Institute, and is neither funded by, nor does it represent the opinions of the City of Oakland.*

## **Aspiring Marine Biologist Completes Summer Internship at LMI**

*By Kathleen Nay*

Observational skill is an essential quality for a citizen scientist, and Mateo Martinez Lawrence has got it. The recent Alameda High School graduate spent the summer putting his powers of perception into practice as Lake Merritt Institute’s 2026 summer intern. In fact, this was Mateo’s second summer interning with LMI, continuing work he started more than a year ago.

For an intern, each day at Lake Merritt can look a little different. As expected, many days Mateo helped lead volunteers on cleanups around the lake’s perimeter. Sometimes he’d find himself painting over graffiti left on a U-Clean-It Box. But he also participated in water quality monitoring, testing the water’s levels of nitrates, nitrites, and dissolved oxygen, each one an indicator of the lake’s health.

When in balance, nitrates and nitrites are forms of nitrogen that help plants and algae grow, while dissolved oxygen supports aquatic life such as fish and mollusks. But when nitrogen and oxygen become off-balance, the rest of the ecosystem starts to go off-kilter, too. Watching for signs of this nutrient imbalance is an important function that LMI serves for the City of Oakland. For this reason, much of Mateo’s internship was spent taking water samples and assessing the nutrient levels in different regions of the lake.



*Mateo Martinez conducted weekly water quality sampling around Lake Merritt during his summer 2026 internship.*

Working lakeside every day helps hone those scientific observation skills — for example, you notice when the algae starts to look more dense, and when the wildlife’s behavior changes. And when paired with the quantitative nutrient readings, qualitative data helps paint a more complete picture of the lake’s health. Over the course of the summer, Mateo learned to ask questions like, Is the water opaque, or clear? Is the algae thickening? Are fish more concentrated in the lower or upper strata of water? And... what’s that smell?

Cloudy, smelly water thick with algae may indicate an influx of pollution (nitrogen) from upstream. When the algae die, bacteria show up to decompose the plant matter and gobble up oxygen. As oxygen diminishes, some

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fish actually launch themselves above the water's surface, gasping for breath — which, unhelpfully, exposes them to predators. The unfortunate chain reaction all starts higher in the watershed, at the initial point of pollution.

While it's an unhappy story for the fish, Mateo is grateful for the chance to witness it up close. "In AP Environmental Science, we learned about watersheds. It's kind of cool to be able to see real-world examples of things I learned about in class," he says.

But it's not all doom-and-gloom at Lake Merritt. Mateo enjoyed seeing a rotation of creatures visiting Lake Merritt. Pelicans and cormorants are already common lake dwellers, but even more exciting are salmon and bat rays. He managed to spot a few rays once, on the lake's bay-facing side. The growing diversity of wildlife is itself an indicator that Lake Merritt's health is on an upward trajectory.

With the end of summer in sight, what comes next for Mateo? Pursuit of a Bachelor's degree in **Marine Biology**

**at UC Santa Cruz!** "It's a really good marine biology school — fifth in the country," he says with excitement. His experience at LMI will be a solid foundation for him as he takes on university this fall.

"I'm grateful that I was able to see what it's like to monitor a local body of water. It gives me insight on what specific career in ecology or marine biology I want to go into. I know I want to do something facing that field, but... there are a lot of different positions that I [could] have, in theory, [so] it was nice to experience this one. Like, okay, I could see myself doing this in the future, professionally."

Something else that will stick with Mateo: how impactful it is to work with volunteers. "It's really sweet that there are a ton of regulars — people who come to pretty much every single one of the cleanups. It's made me love the community more."

Thank you, Mateo, for all your hard work at LMI this summer! We're so grateful for your contributions, and we're excited for you as you take the next steps in your career journey.



## We are looking for a new Board Member!



Lake Merritt Institute is seeking a dedicated community member to join our Board. A science background or fundraising experience would be highly considered. Interested? Please reach out with your cover letter to [info@lakemerrittinstitute.org](mailto:info@lakemerrittinstitute.org).

*Founded in 1992, Lake Merritt Institute is dedicated to protecting, restoring, and enhancing Lake Merritt and its surrounding watershed through environmental stewardship, water-quality monitoring and research, habitat restoration, pollution reduction, education, and community engagement.*

*LMI works to foster public appreciation and responsibility for Lake Merritt's natural resources while supporting a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable urban estuary for people and wildlife.*

For the full article of *The Tidings* in color, visit <https://lakemerrittinstitute.org/tidings>

## FALL EVENTS AT LAKE MERRITT

### LMI Public Cleanups

Join Lake Merritt Institute volunteers this fall to help keep our beautiful lake clean! Every **Tuesday & Saturday @10AM**

Keep an eye out for rainy days! After a rainstorm is when Lake Merritt needs us most. Rain washes trash from storm drains into the lake, so our volunteers can make a big difference in the days that follow.

**Register** online at [lakemerrittinstitute.org](http://lakemerrittinstitute.org)



### Wild ALCHEMY

*Cultivating a Creative Ecosystem*

**SEPTEMBER 26 | 6-9PM**

Join Us For Our **Annual Art Sale and Fundraiser** Featuring  
**Local Art | Food | Drinks | Music | Auction**

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JCAS Scholarship Fund**



Buy Tickets  
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558 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland | [www.juniorcenter.org](http://www.juniorcenter.org) | @JCAS\_Oakland

### Bird Walks at Lake Merritt

Join Hilary Powers on the fourth Wednesday of every month for a bird walk at the lake.

Register at [goldengatebirdalliance.org](http://goldengatebirdalliance.org)



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## Support Our Back-to-School Program

We're working to raise **\$3,000 by the end of September** so we can open our field trip calendar and begin booking Watershed Field Trips for the **2026–2027 school year**.

Last school year, thanks to community support, we were able to expand our Watershed Field Trip Program and host **13 field trips for local students**. Demand continues to grow. We currently have **two classes waiting to schedule their field trips**, and additional teachers are reaching out about upcoming dates.

Your support today will help us open the calendar and continue providing students with hands-on opportunities to learn about Lake Merritt, water quality, watershed health, and environmental stewardship.

**Help us reach our \$3,000 goal by the end of September.** Together, we can cultivate the next generation of stewards of Lake Merritt.

Donate today at [www.lakemerrittinstitute.org](http://www.lakemerrittinstitute.org)



For sponsorships, questions, or comments please email us at [info@lakemerrittinstitute.org](mailto:info@lakemerrittinstitute.org).

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