THE TIDINGS

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Humans of Lake Merritt

By the Oakland High School ESA 10 Students

This fall, Lake Merritt Institute partnered with the 10th grade Environmental Science Academy (ESA 10) students at Oakland High School to learn about who visits the lake, and why. Their assignment was to interview and photograph people they met around the lake. The essential question they are exploring this semester is: **To what extent is Lake Merritt a "triumph of the commons"?** Many thanks to all the Lake Merritt visitors who shared their time and thoughts; to the students who contributed their work to the Tidings; and to OUSD teacher, Lara Trale, for collaborating with us! This project was originally inspired by Brandon Stanton's Humans of New York.

Project Overview

For more than 150 years, Lake Merritt has been at the civic and cultural center of Oakland. A scientifically important tidal lagoon, a gathering space, a place of culture, a business center, a home, and a site for many forms of recreation, the lake plays an important role in many Oaklanders' relationships with their city. In this unit, the ESA 10 students read and wrote about nonfiction texts, then interviewed real people about the role of the lake in their lives. From these interviews, they created a gallery of people's stories and the subjects' own analyses of how the lake shapes the lives of the people who use it. The interviews featured here are just a small curation of the lakegoers they talked to.

The Right Brothers, walkers



Shown: Right brothers
Portrait by Yahmani Peoples

"We just went out on a stroll enjoying the weather. I love it outside—not the best weather but just enjoying the outside, wanna get some steps in."

"The plan was to walk 30 times today. We are on Lap One still."

"I want to be here more. I've only been out here in Oakland for like a year. I moved out here from Boston — Cambridge, Massachusetts. Went to Harvard and got my master's degree out there in education, was out here working for a non-profit and, you know, been enjoying Oakland for the time. But it's funny y'all caught us because we're probably about to be leaving. He talking about walking across the country today! But yeah, I mean we kinda just tryna figure it out right now. Two young Black men just tryna figure it out in America. To be continued."

"Yeah, I came out here because of bro, yeah he did everything."

"Lake Merritt means the best part of Oakland. And we love to walk, definitely. Outside is something we love so it's just a great place, the safest, kinda coolest place to be in Oakland. I'm still kinda building a community, but my brother is here."

— Interview and transcript by Yahmani Peoples

Zi, jogger



Portrait by Madison Saechao

"My name is Zi, and this is Nicholas. I take my son here almost every day. We run and we stop here, we play at the structure and we continue running. Usually, it's just me and my son. His mom, my wife, usually works at this time. I've grown up in Oakland most of my life. I usually run around here, so I've been running around here for over — wow! — more than 10 years. You know what, there has been a lot of funny memories [at the lake], but to pinpoint one, not so much. If it wasn't obvious from my answers, my favorite thing to do here is run, run around the lake. I remember Lake Merritt when it was the inner circle, a lot of it still wasn't paved. So that was a positive change. I hope it doesn't disappear, or they don't neglect it and let it become derelict or something like that. That would be sad."

— Interview and transcript by Gary Chen

All Tentacles on Deck!

Fall Update

We kicked off our end-of-year fundraising this month by participating in one of Oakland's most popular annual events, Autumn Lights Festival, held by the Gardens at Lake Merritt. This year marked the festival's 15th anniversary and our second year participating. Our light-up installation, All Tentacles on Deck!, featured Henry the skeleton, clad in a life jacket and Oakland Athletics cap, kayaking through polluted waters when he is confronted by a giant purple octopus ensnared in trash. The dramatic scene highlights the real challenge of pollution in Lake Merritt, and it invites us to imagine a cleaner, more harmonious environment for the lake's community and resident creatures!



All Tentacles on Deck! Installation

For the first time, we also had a book-fair style table in the festival's art market, featuring bird-themed books and gifts made by local authors and artists. Thanks to visitor engagement with our knowledgeable volunteers and with our market table, we reached a new record for donations from a single event: $1,325!

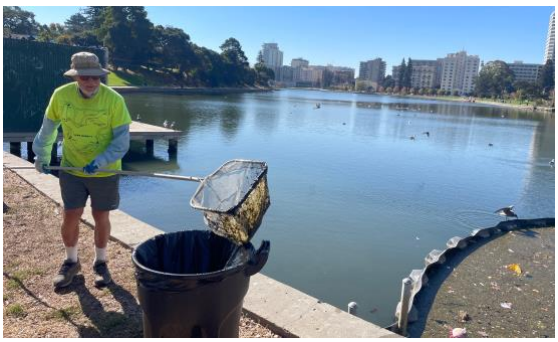


LMI's art market table

We are thrilled about this milestone and are not slowing down! Holiday season is fast approaching, and we need your help to raise $35,633 before the end of the year. Your tax-deductible donation directly supports the preservation of Oakland's Crown Jewel. Meeting our goal will mean we can continue to remove trash pollution that flows into Lake Merritt from over 62 storm drains, provide environmental education programs to local youth, and equip and train hundreds of volunteers each month for our year-round cleanups throughout 2027, among other stewardship activities. Supporters like you make it possible for us to keep Lake Merritt clean and thriving for both wildlife and the community. You can donate through our website or by scanning the QR code in the announcements on the following page.

FALL ANNOUNCEMENTS & EVENTS AT LAKE MERRITT

LMI Public Cleanups – We Need Your Help This Rainy Season!



With the rainy season here, we are seeing more trash washing into Lake Merritt and need all hands on deck to keep up! Join us this season to help clean up Lake Merritt for our community and wildlife.

- Public cleanups are held every Tuesday and Saturday at 10 AM

Register online at lakemerrittinstitute.org

Thank You, Volunteers!



Thank you to our volunteers and staff who helped make our participation in the 15th Annual Autumn Lights Festival such a success and for bringing their enthusiasm for Lake Merritt to the Gardens!

All Tentacles on Deck Fundraiser!



Autumn Lights Festival marked the start of our end-of-year fundraiser, giving LMI a head start towards **our goal of $70K** and setting us up for success next year. Click the image (for the digital newsletter) or scan the QR code below to donate today!

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.



For sponsorships, questions, or comments please email us at info@lakemerrittinstitute.org.
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