

## Ballona Creek Renaissance...

A 501c(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to renewing Ballona Creek and its watershed for a healthier, more sustainable environment and community.

(We're also known as BCR)

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

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## IT'S WHAT WE DO.

Requests for our educational environmental events are multiplying. As an all-volunteer organization, Ballona Creek Renaissance provides programs in the Ballona Creek Watershed tailored to the interests and abilities of the participants. Here are some events we led in recent months:

### Sony Done-in-a-Day employee volunteer event.

Each year, Sony Pictures Corporation, headquartered in Culver City, creates a one-day opportunity for its employees to volunteer. On April 27, about 100 local Sony employees spent the morning working on two ongoing BCR projects. About 70 of them staged one of our very popular creek cleanups at Centinela Avenue, hauling out trash flushed into the creek by rain two days earlier. Items fished out of the creek included a lunch box, a full bottle of bleach; baseball, bike and motorcycle helmets; and a \$50 bill. The remaining volunteers did heavy work removing weeds and planting 32 more native plants at the BCR's Creekside Native Plant Garden on the Culver City Middle and High School athletic fields next to the creek path.



A section of the creek bank at Centinela Ave. before and after the Sony Volunteers cleaned it up. Photos taken by Kat Bronson looking down from the Centinela Ave. bridge

**Hope High School Ballona Field Trip, June 6:** Longtime BCR volunteers Eleanor Osgood and Michelle Weiner and BCR president Jim Lamm had a very successful tour with 15 students and two teachers from this South LA continuation school. The trip was made possible by TreePeople Generation Earth.



Eleanor's bag of binoculars was very helpful during the walk in the Freshwater Marsh and Bluffs, Del Rey Lagoon Park, and Ballona Creek as the leaders pointed out wildlife as well as environmental problems and opportunities to the students. Afterward, teacher Anne Marie Ankers wrote, "The trip was successful beyond our expectations. Many of the students are planning to return on their own, and several want to continue studying on their own."

**Culver City Sister Cities Committee-sponsored Youth Summit July 24-25.**

Culver City's North American Sister Cities are Lethbridge, Canada and Uruapan, Mexico. BCR led activities for 4 students each from Lethbridge, Uruapan and Culver City, plus 4 visiting adults on July 24 (2-hr presentation and dialog) and on July 25 (creek cleanup, tour and lunch in wetlands area, and creekside garden restoration). Volunteer leaders from BCR and other local organizations included Jim Lamm and David Valdez, June Walden, Michelle Weiner and Cindy Hardin. In a follow-up note from Shauna Lewis of Sister Cities International in Washington DC wrote "The students learned to be more aware of the impact of human actions on the environment and many are motivated to continue working for environmental causes after the program."



The Sister Cities youth and leaders during their Ballona tour.

participation. For more information, click on <http://www.northeasttrees.org/Culver-City-Green-23Space-Plan.asp>.

**At BCR's booth at the annual Fiesta la Ballona, August 25-26,** in Culver City, with photos and maps we connected with visitors who want to know more about the creek and how they can help.

**All September, Ballona Creek Renaissance Display at Culver City Julian Dixon Library.**

BCR's annually updated display in the library lobby for Creek and watershed photos, information, and upcoming events.

**Coastal Cleanup Day, September 15.** BCR managed two creek cleanup sites this day, one at our favorite spot at Centinela Avenue, the other at Overland Avenue beside the library and the renovated bikeway entrance garden. Over 150 volunteers participated. Some unusual items collected included 5 automobile tires, some rebar, various kinds of balls, a phone and a dead pelican. At Centinela, volunteers were amazed that a (live) pelican helped them clean up by pushing a ball out of the bushes towards them, seemingly unafraid of people and apparently understanding the significance of their work.



Two of the Hamilton High students who hauled five tires and rebar from the creek on Coastal Cleanup Day. Photo by Becky Schreiber

**Culver City Green Space Plan.** Jim Lamm and BCR boardmember Michele Bigelow teamed with North East Trees in this grant-funded project to explore new opportunities for 'passive' recreation in Culver City's parks and other public green spaces. It's intended to expand quieter forms of recreation and wellness activities such as walking, bird watching, and tai chi while improving the environment. This on-going project seeks continuing public

**7:00pm, Wednesday, October 17: Ballona Creek and Watershed Talk at Culver City Historical Society.** Jim Lamm will give an illustrated talk about the creek and its watershed--past, present, and future. In the multipurpose room at Veteran's Memorial Building, 4117 Overland Ave, Culver City. Enter from behind the building. For more information: <http://culvercityhistoricalsociety.org/>.

## THE PUBLIC PROCESS BEGINS FOR BALLONA WETLANDS RESTORATION



### Bulldozers versus hand trowels

The wetlands have been mired in controversy seemingly forever-- at least many decades, since developers wanted to pave it over with roads and buildings and environmentalists wanted to preserve it. That chapter of the conflict ended in 2003, when, after 20 years of efforts by the public, the state of California purchased more than 600 acres of the ecosystem. Immediately began another period of controversy, as various groups have continued to argue over whether or how to repair and reshape the wetlands to better serve the needs of both wildlife and people, from a very minimal reworking to a complete recontouring of the land and integrating it with Ballona Creek.

Over the past few years, the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission and a scientific team have been documenting the current state of the wetlands- the plants and animals that live there, the soil conditions, water quality, the ravages of civilization. A baseline report on the 2010-2011 years is now available online at <http://santamonibay.org/BWRP/BaselineReports.html>. (Blue text is clickable in the online PDF version.)

Now the public process of deciding what will happen at the wetlands has formally begun. In our Spring 2012 issue, we printed a condensed article by David Kay describing the legal process for determining the goals and

the process for reaching them. The state and federal agencies overseeing the project-- the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps)-- have issued notices of the process and will prepare environmental reviews of potential designs and document their likely impacts on wildlife, water pollution, local traffic, and other factors. The agencies will examine the impacts to aesthetics, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, water quality, land use and planning, noise, public services, recreation, sea-level rise, traffic and others matters.

Public comments were solicited at a public meeting in August. Further comments may be submitted until October 23 to Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project, c/o Donna McCormick, 1 Ada, Suite 100, Irvine, CA 92816 or by email to [Donna.McCormick@icfi.com](mailto:Donna.McCormick@icfi.com). For documents, reports and FAQs about the project, go to [www.ballonarestoration.org](http://www.ballonarestoration.org).

**Malibu Lagoon Restoration.** Meanwhile, only a few miles north of Ballona Wetlands, the Malibu Lagoon restoration, which was temporarily stalled by a lawsuit challenging the extensive work, is proceeding well, according to the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Foundation. Follow the exciting progress at the project website: [www.restoremalibulagoon.com](http://www.restoremalibulagoon.com).



## A DIFFERENT KIND OF WETLANDS “RESTORATION”

### Cleaning up illegal uses of the wetlands

The various portions of the wetlands are now owned by the California Dept of Fish and Game, but illegal human use continues to degrade it. Problems include:

- Camping by homeless persons (a particularly severe problem in this economy)
- Dumping of construction and other materials
- Dog walking without cleanup of pet waste
- Burning of vegetation, mostly by the homeless to keep warm.
- Building of ramps for BMX bikes and courses for ATVs (all-terrain vehicles)
- Overgrowth of non-native vegetation, crowding out native plants used by wildlife for food and nesting.

The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) rangers and fire-fighters are conducting a campaign to reduce these problems. Solitary and group camps of homeless persons are pervasive. The MRCA works with social service organizations that provide group homes and other services for the homeless, but many of them refuse help; they may be mentally or physically ill, and there is considerable drug use. Removing camps means that some individuals just move to a different portion of the wetlands, or onto the Ballona Creek bikepath itself, or to another public area.

Current efforts are in areas A and C; area B will be next. (See diagram on page 3.)

So far, MRCA has removed 58 tons of debris, 17 camps and 400 needles and has relocated 40 persons.

Focusing on the positive, MRCA calls this campaign a “restoration”. Among the planned next steps are:

- Repair of fences and gates
- Public access trails
- Educational programs in these areas, such as a junior ranger program
- Signage about rules for use



Some homeless persons ripped a hole in the chain link fence separating area B from the south bank of Ballona Creek. Their encampment is littered with debris.

### What are all these agencies?

#### **Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission**

(SMBRC)- a state agency to protect and improve the Santa Monica Bay. Its non-profit funding arm is the **Santa Monica Bay Restoration Foundation** (SMBRF), which provides grants for large and small projects. [www.santamonica bay.org/](http://www.santamonica bay.org/) and [www.santamonica bay.org/AboutUs/aboutus.html](http://www.santamonica bay.org/AboutUs/aboutus.html)

#### **Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority** (MRCA). [www.mrca.ca.gov](http://www.mrca.ca.gov)

A partnership between the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, a state agency established by the Legislature, and the Conejo Recreation and Park District and the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District, both of which are local park agencies established by

a vote of the people in those communities.

#### **Baldwin Hills Conservancy (BHC).** [www.bhc.ca.gov](http://www.bhc.ca.gov)

A state-appointed board whose mission is to acquire open space and manage public lands within the Baldwin Hills area and to provide recreation, restoration and protection of wildlife habitat within the territory for the public's enjoyment and educational experience.

#### **Baldwin Hills Regional Conservation Authority** (BHRCA). <http://smmc.ca.gov/BHRCA.asp>

A partnership of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and Los Angeles County to acquire, expand and improve open space within the Baldwin Hills, Ballona Creek, and other natural and recreational areas in the Second Supervisorial District of LA County. Goals overlap those of the BHC.

## WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS AT DEL REY LAGOON

Virtually all of our local “creeks”, “rivers”, “lagoons” have poor quality water due to bacteria, toxic metals and other contaminants. The Federal Clean Water Act requires states to work toward cleaning up “impaired” bodies of water. This article focuses on Del Rey Lagoon, a remnant of a long inland lagoon formerly connected to the Venice Canals to the north, a connection severed by the cementing of Ballona Creek channel and construction of Marina del Rey.

This popular 5-acre lagoon and park, owned by City of Los Angeles, are located just south of Ballona Creek a block from the shore. The lagoon is connected to the creek through a tide gate at its north end. Various birds (egrets, coots, ducks, geese, gulls, and pigeons) frequent the waters, and many people and pets frequent the adjacent park and grassy areas. Water quality testing since 2001 has shown that the water flowing out of the lagoon into the creek after high tide is more polluted than water flowing in from the creek and ocean after low tide. A current study and project by Los Angeles deals only with bacteria from warm-blooded animals (birds and mammals).

Sources of bacteria in the lagoon waters include:

- Waste from pets and non-native birds (pigeons, geese) and animals (squirrels, gophers)
- Park irrigation runoff
- Rain runoff from streets into the lagoon because there are no below-ground storm drains.



This pipe carries polluted stormwater runoff into the lagoon from the adjacent street.

Proposals to improve water quality include:

- A bioswale around the lagoon (a depressed area where waters can sink into the ground instead of running into the lagoon.) with drought-tolerant plants.



Hundreds of pigeons are attracted to the park only because well-intentioned but uninformed visitors feed them.

- Construction of storm drains in adjacent streets that carry stormwater to Hyperion wastewater treatment plant.
- Replacing the boat launch ramp with an observation deck to discourage contact with water.
- Installing a more efficient irrigation system
- Public education (signs and utility bill inserts) to not to feed wildlife or wash cars nearby.
- Pet waste disposal bags and trash cans

The project is expected to last 2 to 2 ½ years and cost about \$2 million.

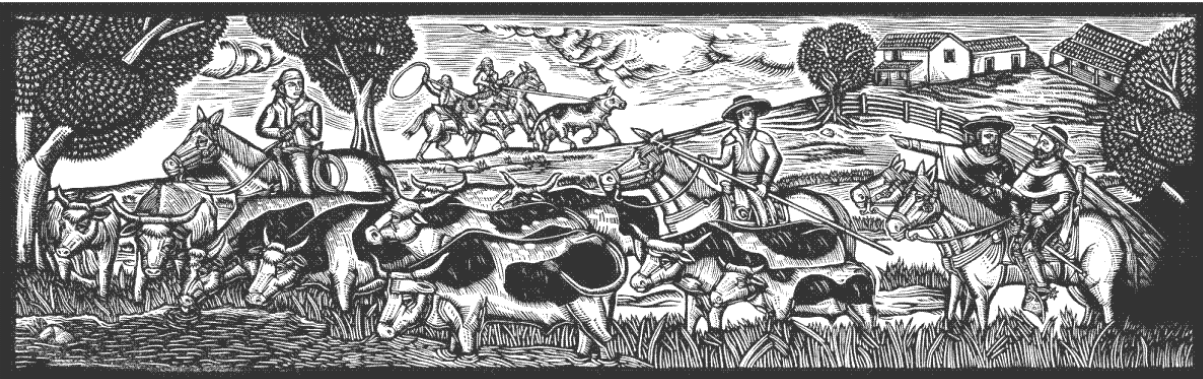
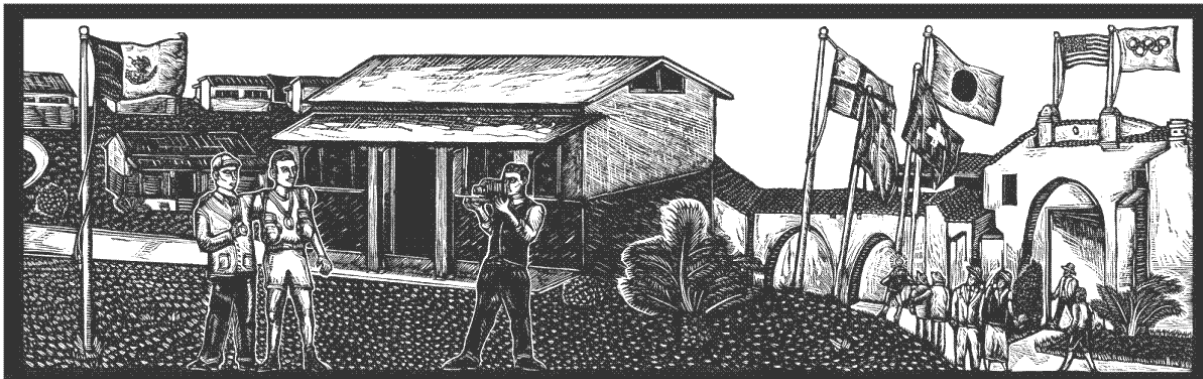


Geese approach people for food.



## BALLONA VALLEY ART ON THE EXPO LINE

The stations on the new Expo Light Rail line all have artworks depicting the neighborhoods around the station. The station at La Cienega and Jefferson Blvds has a fine series of 8 panels by artist Daniel Gonzalez depicting periods and events in the Ballona Creek Watershed. Metro has graciously given us permission to reproduce the panels. Enjoy, and go visit your Expo Line stations to see all the art



Top to bottom: 1. 1932 Olympic Village. 2. 1963 Baldwin Hills Dam Break. 3. California Rancho Period. 4. Early Western Films in Culver City.





Top to bottom: 1. Neighborhood Tryptich; 2. Panoramic View (with the Baldwin Hills, Ballona Creek in the middle and historic Culver City buildings)  
3. Portola Expedition; 4. Tongva Village.

Reproductions Courtesy of Metro © 2012 Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority. La Cienega/Jefferson Station, Engraved in Memory, Daniel Gonzalez, Artist. Courtesy of Metro © 2008 Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

## A HOUSING PROJECT FOR TREE SWALLOWS



Photo: Robert Thomas

Professor of Biology at LMU and director of the Center for Urban Resilience and Ecological Solutions.

A program blending ecology and sociology is in progress at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in Westchester. The program involves placing nest boxes for tree swallows in appropriate locations, with diverse groups and neighborhoods responsible for construction, maintenance, oversight and learning. The program is guided by Dr. Eric Strauss, President's

15 of the nest boxes were placed in Del Rey Lagoon this spring, too late for this year's nesting season but available for birds house-hunting for 2013. These boxes were funded by Playa Moms, built by the Westchester Environmental Science Magnet (which serves mostly inner-city students), and monitored by the Westchester Senior Citizens Association.

Another six boxes were installed during summer at Culver City Middle School next to BCR's Creekside Native Plant Garden. Guided by Dr. Strauss and LMU graduate students who pre-dug holes in the rock-hard soil, these boxes were placed by native Spanish-speaking Middle School students in the English Language Immersion Program, which uses ecology as a content area. Teachers and LMU staff will initially monitor the boxes, then, in the fall, high school and middle school students.



Dr. Eric Strauss demonstrates nest box assembly to a class at Culver City Middle School as a student makes a video on his iPad.

Dr Strauss hopes to have 300 boxes deployed within this year. There are also a few boxes in the Ballona Wetlands and 19 boxes in the Freshwater Marsh (at the corner of Jefferson and Lincoln Blvds) installed by others over several years.

The scientific purpose of the nest box program is to develop and answer questions about bird behavior, such as what effect climate change may have on reproductive success or sex differences in loyalty to a particular site. A research team of LMU students, headed by faculty member Heather Watts, ornithologist, will investigate reproductive strategies of the tree swallow. Monitoring will involve daily checks during breeding season, including looking for eggs, recording the number of trips birds make to the box to feed, the date of the first appearance of fledglings and when they start to fly. Some monitoring tasks will be handled by the LMU science team, others by students and teachers.



15 nest boxes lined up by Del Rey Lagoon

Other small birds like house finches might use the bird boxes. A metal sheet around the entrance to the nest box prevents bigger birds from enlarging the hole. A black plastic tube around the post prevents squirrels and other animals from getting at the nests.

**Why tree swallows?** Dr. Strauss noted that tree swallows willingly accept artificial housing and are fairly resilient to disturbances from people, dogs and motor vehicles nearby. "We've opened up some existing bird houses [to check on the birds and eggs], and right after we closed them up, the birds went right back in." Tree swallows nest mostly in fields and meadows and on the borders of wetlands. These open areas have flying insects the bird eats, thus the birds are a non-chemical form of insect control for humans.



## Emma Kurihara's Garden

Emma's a senior at Culver City High School. In addition to the normal workload of a college-bound student, she's also been a Girl Scout for 9 years. To earn her Gold Award for a project with lasting impact, she created a native plant garden on the grounds of Culver City Middle School on a 7 ft by 41-ft plot of grass. BCR president Jim Lamm and boardmember Irene Reingold served as advisors for this project, discussing prospective sites and other issues and providing Betsey Landis' authoritative book *Southern California Native Plants for School Gardens* for plant information.



Around the end of July, Emma and her parents dug up the grass and soil, then planted 31 shade-tolerant native plants of 14 different kinds purchased from two local native plant nurseries, which also donated mulch to reduce evaporation. Money that Emma earned from tutoring paid for the plants, which include Coral Bells, Juncus, Coffee

Plant, Strawberries and Thalictrum. Existing sprinklers provide irrigation about once a week. She'll monitor it regularly for maintenance needs.

Emma has also created a planting guide pamphlet for the school library, for others to use after she graduates.

## Milton Street Linear Greenway Update

This future greenway is a long (1,000 ft) narrow (40-45 ft) vacant parcel just downstream from the Centinela Avenue bikepath entrance, owned by the Baldwin Hills Regional Conservation Authority. We wrote about it in our January 2009 and October 2007 issues.

The Baldwin Hills Conservancy has authorized a grant of up to \$2 million in Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) for improvements to develop this natural park. It will have native plants, a meandering walkway, some seating and overlooks to observe the bird life in this part of the creek where the bottom is natural. In a change from previous designs, the walkway will not cross the bikepath, for safety and permitting reasons.

Because the land is part of the creek bank, MRCA can't plant new trees. Instead, it will create planting areas in Milton Street adjacent to the sidewalk for native trees such as sycamore.

Construction is expected to begin in early to mid- 2013.

## Ballona Nature Photography

For some fine photography of (mostly) Ballona wildlife, check out these online photostreams:

Rick Pine: [www.flickr.com/photos/seerixpix](http://www.flickr.com/photos/seerixpix) and Jonathan Coffin: [www.flickr.com/photos/stonebird](http://www.flickr.com/photos/stonebird)

**Want to volunteer with BCR?** Some ways to be involved are: staffing our booths at events, planning public programs, researching grant opportunities, planning fundraising events, working with native plant gardens ...and other ways according to your skills, interests, experience and available time. Contact Jim Lamm at (310) 839-6896 or email [jim.lamm@ballonacreek.org](mailto:jim.lamm@ballonacreek.org).

## Please don't dump your rabbits at the Freshwater Marsh!

August 28, 2012. Dr. Edith Read, Manager of the Freshwater Marsh at the corner of Jefferson and Lincoln Blvds, called Lisa Fimiani, Executive Director of Friends of Ballona Wetlands: five rabbits were loose at the marsh.

That afternoon, they arrived at the marsh with equipment to capture the rabbits- a net, animal carrying cases, and lettuce and carrots as bait- plus two more volunteers, April Sandifer and Courtney McCammon from Loyola Marymount University's Center for Urban Resilience. For nearly two hours they stalked and chased the rabbits, which by now numbered nine (you know how fast rabbits multiply), while trying to prevent them from running into the street. Finally, all the known rabbits were caught and transported to a temporary shelter in Lisa's back yard.



Lisa Fimiani about to nab her target. Photo by Courtney McCammon.

Lisa says of the episode: "They obviously were somebody's pets. People [wanting to get rid of pets] think this is the best thing for them. They would have been eaten up by raccoons, cats, or coyotes, or run over by cars - or caused an accident by people swerving to miss them." [Ed note: they could also damage marsh plants or bird nests.]

Sometimes, adorable baby animals become less adorable over time. What should you do if your pet no longer fits your lifestyle? There are many animal shelters and rescue organizations. For a start, Google something like "Rabbit Rescue". But don't dump them in some natural-looking area thinking they'll be fine; they'll either perish or create problems for someone else.

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## reDiscover Honors Sandrine Cassidy Schmitt at Art and Education Event

At its Sept. 20 design event supporting art and sustainability in education, reDiscover Center Mar Vista honored June Fifteen founder Sandrine Cassidy Schmitt, who also serves on the BCR Board of Directors.



Sandrine (left) and reDiscover Director Mary Beth Trautwein. Photo: Patch

As reported in Venice-Mar Vista Patch, all "June Fifteen bags are handcrafted in India with natural sustainable materials. The collection is primarily made of renewable jute, rattan cane and 100% cotton and the company's suppliers have been audited for Fair-trade and hold

the ISO 9001 stand of quality certificate. Each of the bags sold and used contributes to overall waste reduction and benefits dedicated environmental organizations through June Fifteen's donation policy and its recycling program. Stock in the US is packed by Americans with disabilities."

Among the event guests, BCR President Jim Lamm reported, "It was great to share in reDiscover's interactive event that honored Sandrine's for her passionate and worthwhile work and her generosity to schools and the community! Ballona Creek Renaissance is lucky to have her on our board!" June Fifteen's website is [www.june15collection.com/](http://www.june15collection.com/)

**This newsletter is available as a print edition and an online document in PDF format (both in color).**

If you're getting one version and prefer the other, let us know at [editor@ballonacreek.org](mailto:editor@ballonacreek.org) and we'll switch you. Note that in the online version, the blue text represents clickable links.



## More rain gardens sprout along Ballona Creek



View from across the creek of a portion of the rain garden next to the bikepath, showing two of the drains for water from the Farragut School parking and playground areas into the landscaped gardens (more are to the right of the photo).

Our Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 issues described two “rain garden” projects in and near the creek channel. Rain gardens capture some polluted rain runoff from streets and parking lots and filter it into specially prepared ground basins instead of dumping it into the storm drains, creeks and rivers, and ultimately the ocean. The cleaned water can then sink into the water table for re-use. Native plants make them look like ordinary gardens.

In late July, Culver City Public Works finished another set of rain gardens along the Ballona Creek bikeway between Overland Avenue and the pedestrian bridge across the creek. They replace about half of the planted section of the Culver City bikeway project completed in 2011. The

landscaping was removed and a deep trench dug to install engineered dispersal chambers and four catch basins with filtration devices to collect and clean rainwater run-off from the Farragut Avenue school playground and parking areas and infiltrate it into the ground (not into Ballona Creek), topped by more California native plants.

These rain gardens were designed to capture the first  $\frac{3}{4}$ ” rainfall and can store about 600 cubic feet of water. The project also removed weeds and dead plants from the previous landscaping. The project cost of \$280,646 was paid by funds from Proposition 50, passed by voters in 2002 for water projects.

Editor: Bobbi Gold

This newsletter reflects and celebrates the diversity of the people and activities of the watershed and beyond. La Ballona Creek Renaissance Program is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Our Tax ID # is 95-4764614. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Please mail contributions to Ballona Creek Renaissance, P.O. Box 843, Culver City, CA 90232. For address corrections, additions or deletions, please call (310) 837-3661 or email [editor@ballonacreek.org](mailto:editor@ballonacreek.org). Unattributed photos are the property of BCR.



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Address correction requested

## FALL 2012 NEWSLETTER

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**BALLONA CREEK RENAISSANCE** needs your help to renew the Westside's  
forgotten river and its watershed!

\_\_\_ \$1,000 \_\_\_ \$500 \_\_\_ \$250 \_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_ \$50 \_\_\_ \$25 \$ \_\_\_ other

\_\_\_ I would like to volunteer my time \_\_\_ I would like to join the board of directors/advisory council

Other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Please use my entire contribution to benefit BCR's programs, **OR**

\_\_\_ I'd like a tote bag for my donation of \$50 or more, **OR**

\_\_\_ I'd like a T-shirt for my donation of \$50 or more (circle size: S M L XL)



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**Please make your donation payable to "Ballona Creek Renaissance"**

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