



at the **Corps** of things

The Newsletter of the Los Angeles Conservation Corps • Winter/Spring 2003

Main Street—Then and Now

On April 29, the Los Angeles Conservation Corps will celebrate the Grand Re-Opening of our Main St. site. But before we look forward, let's look back....

The old fire station that sits at the corner of 29th and Main in South Central opened on February 18, 1949 as the firehouse for Engine Company No. 7. At that time the land it sat on cost \$8,750 and the construction of the structure itself cost a meager \$161,352. For 20 years, Engine Co. 7 ran out of this firehouse. It was the integration "experiment" site for eight black firefighters who were transferred to Engine Co. 7 in January 1956. And it worked! For 13 more years, firefighters responded to fires in South Central Los Angeles rolling their rigs through the doors seen here. Then on August 10, 1969 the company moved to Fire Station 15 and the firehouse was closed.

The firehouse sat vacant for the next 17 years, reopening on April 15, 1986, as a site for young people in khaki corpsmember uniforms and vans instead of for men in blue uniforms and fire trucks.

For the first six years of the LACC, Main St. served as home for all of LACC's programs. In those days the site was shared by Administration, Payroll, the Adult Corps Program, Education Department and Clean & Green until in 1992 when the Hammel Center opened as an East Los Angeles expansion of the Corps. Clean & Green and Administration have also moved on to new homes but the site has remained a hub for the Adult Corps and Academic Programs.

Executive Director Bruce Saito put his best networking and negotiating skills to work three years ago and secured \$2 million in Park Bond funding to implement a top to bottom renovation project at Main St. The new-and-improved Main St. with its state-of-art-technology, space redesign and upgrades will allow us to better provide education and job training services to approximately 200 corpsmembers every year. The site includes a computer lab, six classrooms and a counseling room in a youth center environment that will respect and engage the young people who come to the LACC.



Engine Co. No. 7 firefighters at Main St. circa 1950.



Main Street circa 1956.



The New-and-Improved Main St. will be unveiled on April 29, 2003.

Save The Date!
Main Street Grand Re-Opening
April 29, 2003

9 – 10 a.m. Building Tours and Refreshments

10 – 11 a.m. Program

Join us as we show off the New and Improved Main St.!

Executive Director's Message

Bruce Saito



Founding Executive Director, Martha Diepenbrock and current Executive Director, Bruce Saito.

We will mark yet another highlight in the 17-year history of the Corps when we dedicate the re-opening of our Main St. site on April 29.

There have been so many individuals and organizations that have made significant contributions to the development and support of the Los Angeles Conservation Corps over the years but no one has given and means more to the Corps than our founding Executive Director, Martha Diepenbrock. Over 18 years ago, Martha and I met with Mickey Kantor to apply for positions at the Corps. Mickey made a wise choice in hiring Martha as the Director and me as the Program Manager and the Los Angeles Conservation Corps began in the fall of 1985. With a borrowed telephone and a small grant from the California Community Foundation, the LACC was off and crawling.

I started in November while Martha spent two months and the holidays moving back to California. We set up shop at the County AFL-CIO and challenged ourselves to open our doors by April. The only problem was that we didn't have a place to call home. With less than four months to go until opening, the pressure was on. Martha worked like a crazy person in those months and with great support from the office of Councilman Gilbert Lindsay (Council District 9), we were able to hire our first 27 corpsmembers. We pushed open the big garage doors at 2824 S. Main St. on April 15, 1986.

I could tell you volumes about our very special home on Main St. and I will if you come and share this very special moment with us on April 29. On behalf of Martha and all of our current and past Board of Directors members, we thank you all for making our dream come true.

Program Brief—EcoAcademy

by Laura Grenholm, Education Manager



EcoAcademy's student body pose for a class picture at EcoAcademy High School in Pico Union.

EcoAcademy High School began like any other LACC endeavor: a conversation between a couple people dedicated to a cause bigger than themselves. Noel Trout, Director of Academic Programs, and Irene Lopez, Director of the Clean & Green Program, were both intimately aware of the need for alternative educational opportunities for under-served youth in Los Angeles. They recognized the power in combining two already successful programs of the LACC. With that vision, and the support of the Excelsior Education Center, we began the hard work of transforming the Clean & Green Central Office into a functioning high school.

On July 6, 2002, EcoAcademy opened its doors as the third charter school site of the Corps. We currently serve 55 students, between the ages of 15 and 17, who either dropped out or were kicked out of the traditional school system. Our students go to school full-time and also work for the Clean & Green program on Friday afternoons and Saturdays.

Through an emphasis in academic basics, service to the environment, and participation in community, EcoAcademy is a model of LACC's core principals.

The best part about what we do is that it works. The majority of our students come to us with an accumulation of negative educational experiences that have been built up through years of being in a school system that did not meet their needs. We work to lay a whole new foundation upon which students may begin, perhaps for the first time, to be willing participants in the learning process. Through an emphasis in academic basics, service to the environment, and participation in community, EcoAcademy is a model of LACC's core principals.

Having just begun our third quarter, we are beginning to understand the immense needs to which we are responding. Students interested in joining the school must commit to a three-day orientation before being selected for enrollment. At each quarterly enrollment orientation, the number of prospective students in attendance doubles what we have space for. With this, we are reminded of the extraordinary number of youth who are finding themselves with no opportunity for another chance at success. Although we wish we did not have to turn anyone away, we are proud to provide 55 EcoAcademy students the space they need for personal development and academic achievement. We are extremely fortunate to have a diversity of talented, patient and driven staff who have truly exceeded all expectations. Every day brings new challenges and rewards, and every evening I could not feel more humbled or inspired by the work we do.

Board Spotlight— Jimmy Rideau

by Felicia Vann, CCTC Program Manager

Jimmy Rideau brings over 30 years of experience working with non-profit agencies to his seat on the LACC Board of Directors. Mr. Rideau was encouraged to join the Board by his long-time friend and colleague Don Bailey, who has served on the LACC Board of Directors for approximately five years but was inspired to take on the role of Board Member after a conversation with Executive Director Bruce Saito, who he says is a “very special person.” Impressed by the work of the Corps, Jimmy joined the Board in April 2002.

Most of Mr. Rideau's experience is in the field of real estate. He has made solid accomplishments in the acquisition, refurbishing and sale of property. Currently, Mr. Rideau is the sole proprietor of J.B. Rideau & Co., which specializes in rentals to senior citizens, the disabled and low-income families.

Jimmy has worked with the Owners of Subsidized Housing Association as the Founding President, the Golden Steppers Senior Citizens Club as an advisor and fundraiser and the Community Relations Counsel of the U.S. Department of Labor as a member. However, his most rewarding experiences have been with the 100 Black Men of Los Angeles, an organization that provides mentors, tutors and scholarships to 2,000 high school students, the Tiger's Youth Club, an organization committed to providing recreation and guidance to primarily Japanese American students and the City of Hope Cancer Research Hospital (Inner Circle Chapter) where Jimmy serves as a member and active fundraiser. Now most of Mr. Rideau's time and energy is focused on the efforts of the William H. Parker Police Foundation, which raises funds to buy police equipment and send active duty policeman to specialized trainings. Mr. Rideau is proud of his efforts with the Parker Police Foundation and feels that the work of the Foundation has made a significant impact on the development of the Los Angeles Police Department.

Mr. Rideau is an active member of the Los Angeles community and strives to make a difference in the lives of others. He embraces any opportunity to help the less fortunate and is always willing to offer his hand to help them succeed in life. Since joining the Board, Jimmy has gained a new respect for LACC corpsmembers. He feels that “the LACC program does an outstanding job helping young people succeed in life and will do his part in spreading the word about the Corps.”



Jimmy Rideau, one of LACC's newest board members, with a friend at the Russell Kantor Scholarship Luncheon and Open House.

LACC Thanks You!

Our most sincere appreciation goes to the individuals, foundations, businesses and organizations that donated to and provided Russell Kantor Scholarship funds to Los Angeles Conservation Corps youth.

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**“The LACC program does an
outstanding job helping young
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Corpsmember Spotlight— Rochelle Saucillo

Rochelle Saucillo sits behind her desk typing up a report for a housing inspector at the Los Angeles Housing Department. She takes a few moments away from her work to remember her time at the Corps. The following is a recap of that recent conversation.

Rochelle is a Corps success story. Her story is like many of her peers. She came to us in May 1999 in search of a high school diploma and work experience. By July 2001 she had finished her graduation requirements and moved into a front office receptionist position at the Corps. After seven months, she started looking for the “perfect” job—something with a Monday-Friday schedule, set hours and benefits with an opportunity for professional growth beyond the Corps.

Rochelle grew up in Eagle Rock with her parents, two brothers and a sister. She experienced what many of our corpsmembers do—she just didn’t get the attention she needed at Franklin High School. There were so many kids that she got lost in the shuffle. She tried continuation school but the lack of structure bored her so she dropped out in the 11th grade. She got a job with the thought always at the back of her mind that she would one day go back to high school and graduate. But after nine months working as a receptionist at the Community Centers on Vermont she was growing weary. She moved from Eagle Rock to South Central and her boyfriend’s friend told her about the Corps. Like so many others, she was drawn to the Corps by the knowledge that she could work and go to school at the same time. She now admits that she probably wasn’t as serious about school as she should have been and that after not



Rochelle and her younger sister Ranette pose for the camera at the Corps’ High School Graduation ceremony in July 2001.

paying attention for awhile, she got serious. Rochelle graduated from LACC’s charter high school in July 2001.

“I would like to thank the LACC staff for encouraging me when I wanted to give up and especially the case managers for helping me cope with difficulties while I was at the Corps.”

Working in-center at Main St. and on trails crews, Rochelle looked forward to the days when she could do what she enjoyed most—tree planting with students on elementary school campuses. She completed Weatherization Energy Efficiency Rehabilitation (WEER) training and learned how to install fans and carbon monoxide detectors. This was independent work and allowed her to focus more on getting to know the corpsmembers on her small crew. The work took her to new places and she liked it. She remembers that

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she wasn't used to getting dirty when she started at the Corps and that working with large numbers of corpsmembers taught her to value diversity. She learned respect and tolerance but most of all she practiced the art of getting to work on time and keeping good attendance. These are the skills that have helped her to earn a competitive wage in her new position as Clerk/Typist with the LA Housing Department.

Rochelle earned a Russell Kantor Scholarship in November. At first, she was interested in using it to attend pharmacy technician school, but her new job and the perspective she gained while she was looking for a job have changed her focus. Rochelle would like to study business so

that she can one day be a management analyst.

"I would like to thank the LACC staff for encouraging me when I wanted to give up and especially the case managers for helping me cope with difficulties while I was at the Corps." Rochelle hopes to move up the ladder at the Housing Department. She recently learned of an opportunity to participate in a program to become an Assistant Housing Inspector and so she signed up. "The Corps taught me about responsibility," Rochelle remembers. The hard work and discipline she learned at the Corps will help her reach any goal she sets for herself in the future.

DID YOU KNOW...

On any given night in Los Angeles County there are up to 84,300 people who are homeless. Parents and children constitute 20% and unaccompanied youth constitute 5% of the homeless population. Approximately 15% of families are homeless for four to six months and 11% for over one year. Single individuals are more likely than families to be homeless three or more times (37% vs. 23%).¹ *Statistics from our current corpsmember population show that 10% of corpsmembers are homeless and another 35% are in danger of becoming homeless.*

The Los Angeles Conservation Corps Support & Transition Services Department recently received a Transitional Living Program grant from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services to respond to this challenge. Approximately a dozen corpsmembers will reside in supportive apartments and receive life skill classes (cooking, cleaning, budgeting, time management) for up to 18 months while they save a portion of their earnings for a down payment for their own apartment.

¹ "Who is Homeless in Los Angeles?" Institute for the Study of Homelessness and Poverty at the Weingart Center.

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Anatomy of a Project, Part I

by Randal W. Ridges, Project Coordinator

Woodley Avenue is a rather non-descript artery that runs 11 miles north-south through the heart of the San Fernando Valley between Balboa Blvd. to the north and Burbank Blvd. to the south. It is like many other streets that thread through the Valley—mini-malls filled with 7-Elevens, burrito joints and dry cleaners occupy most of the main intersections and blocks of apartment buildings, light industry and the occasional single family dwelling fill the stretches in-between.

At the southernmost end of Woodley the hodge-podge of mixed zoning uses comes to an abrupt end as the roadway enters the Sepulveda Basin Recreation Area, a large flood-control basin designed and maintained by the United States Army Corps of Engineers. The basin has been developed into a large public complex consisting of four parks, a man-made lake, two golf courses, a dog park, a skate park and several wildlife areas. The Sepulveda Dam, a local landmark that is seen daily by hundreds of thousands of commuters creeping along the 101 and 405 freeways, marks the end of the basin.

In late 2000, the Los Angeles Conservation Corps was awarded a grant from the Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program (EEMP) by the California Transportation Commission and the State of California. Appropriately named “Bikeways and Greenways,” this project proposed to plant 1280 trees along Class I bike paths, Class II bike lanes and Class III bike routes in order to mitigate the negative affects of increased freeway traffic flow in the area.

The Sepulveda Basin Recreation Area is surrounded and bisected by bike lanes and paths—nearly 10 miles worth—



The stretch of Woodley Avenue seen here, now filled with dirt, will someday accommodate 180 trees that will shade the path and green the thoroughfare.

that snake down White Oak, Victory, Burbank and Balboa with extensions that wander through the various parks that make up the Recreation Area. The only Class I bike path is on Woodley. Parallel- ing the avenue on the west side at distances of 15 to 90 feet from the roadbed, it consists of two, level, white-striped and brightly shimmering lanes, 1.2 miles in length, bordered on the west by a split-rail wooden fence and nearly devoid of trees or any other vegetation. Devoid, that is, with the exception of two large Eucalyptus trees that stand as lonely sentinels almost equidistant between Victory and Burbank. On hot summer days a traffic-jam of hot and tired bikers that rivals the nearby 101/405 interchange take a break beneath the swaying boughs.

Los Angeles Conservation Corps' project planners had the foresight to include the Sepulveda Basin in the proposal to EEMP, and specifically identified Woodley Avenue as a candidate for a tree-planting project. They estimated that Woodley could handle up to 180 trees. It was September of 2002 when I went out to the Basin to survey Woodley and other streets for the *Bikeways and Greenways* project. When I turned from Burbank north onto Woodley I immediately noticed the two specimen “Eucs”

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standing alone above the bike path. It was a hot afternoon, and there was hardly enough shade from these two “survivors” to accommodate me as I stood below them. A car was parked dangerously above the root zone—somehow the driver had found a way to maneuver it into the cooling shade. The contrasting starkness of the denuded area around the bike path and the inviting greenery of the parks and golf courses that lay just to the west struck me and I immediately thought that this little piece of the *Bikeways and Greenways* project had the potential to become a showcase, not only for us, the project implementers, but for the City of Los Angeles and the State of California.

I felt that the scope of the project would entail more than just bringing together the various agencies involved in the administration of the Sepulveda Basin Recreation Area. I wanted to do more than just plant a row of trees along the bike path and I knew that I needed help with my vision. I considered why no one else had planted in this area and thought that maybe



the Department of Recreation and Parks had a master plan and that a project to green the corridor was certainly in the planning phases. I wondered if planting was prohibited since I was standing smack in the middle of the flood control basin. As I left the Sepulveda Basin that hot September day, all I knew was that I had an exciting and rare opportunity to create a distinctive tree-planting project. I had a lot of unanswered questions, a handful of trees with which to create a unique palette and only six months in which to bring it all together.

Thus the challenge begins—the next installment of “The Greening of Woodley Avenue” will bring together project participants ranging from the City Department of Recreation and Parks, the County Bureau of Public Works, the local City Council office, the Los Angeles Department of Transportation, the Los Angeles Police Department, the State of California and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Look for it in the Spring edition of at the Corps of things.

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LACC corpsmembers have delivered over 10,000 trees to LA DWP customers through the Department’s Trees for a Green LA program. To receive your free trees, call 1-800-GREENLA.



Governor's Service Project

January 7, 2003

Governor and First Lady Davis joined two Clean & Green teams at Wilmington Park in Los Angeles to perform community beautification projects.



Founded in 1986 by Mickey Kantor, the Los Angeles Conservation Corps gives urban young adults and teens a chance to serve their community through environmental enhancement and community improvement projects.

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Permit No. 30586

at the Corps of things is the quarterly newsletter of the Los Angeles Conservation Corps.

Editor: Wendy Butts

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