

**RE-ENVISIONING THE LOS ANGELES RIVER:
A PROGRAM OF COMMUNITY AND ECOLOGICAL
REVITALIZATION**

**A REPORT ON THE 40 FORUMS, EVENTS, ACTIVITIES,
AND PROJECTS HELD DURING 1999-2000**

**HOSTED BY THE URBAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY INSTITUTE,
OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE**

**IN CONJUNCTION WITH
THE FRIENDS OF THE LOS ANGELES RIVER**



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BACKGROUND

“Landscapes tell stories,” filmmaker Wim Wenders declared, “and the Los Angeles River tells a story of violence and danger.” Wenders made these remarks during one of the sessions of the Re-Envisioning the L.A. River program, a year-long series hosted by the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute at Occidental College. Wenders’ comments were made as part of a panel discussion on how Hollywood films have presented the Los Angeles River as a backdrop for the stories those films tell. The Hollywood panel was one of the programs supported by a Community Heritage grant from the California Council for the Humanities. This Report describes the 40 “Re-Envisioning the L.A. River” events and activities that took place between August 1999 and September 2000. The Report also discusses the broader goals of the Re-Envisioning series, including transforming the discourse around the River and the urban environment of Los Angeles and encouraging actions for community and ecological revitalization.

The landscapes that Wenders referred to were from a film documentary or montage entitled *River Madness* that was edited to include various L.A. River scenes from such Hollywood movies as Them. This classic 1950s science fiction film, which had giant irradiated ants crawling out of the storm drains that fed into the L.A. River, had been filmed at a point when the “war on the L.A. River,” as one Army Corps official characterized it, was reaching a conclusion. By the 1950s, a new landscape had been constructed; a channelized river that served as a passageway for unwanted floodwaters. This new river, or flood channel “freeway,” told a story of a fragmented Los Angeles, a place barren of the softer, more inclusive landscapes of green and open space. The L.A. River, like the city and region itself, had become the anti-environment, where the concept of community and place continued to erode before the onslaught of freeways, concrete, and channelized riverbeds.

During the past decade, the L.A. River has become a subject of intense re-examination, a major topic of policy debate, and a new kind of environmental icon. It increasingly symbolizes the quest to transform the built and natural *urban* environment from a place seen as representing violence and hostility for communities and for Nature, to one of rebirth and opportunity. To re-envision the Los Angeles River as a place of community and ecological revitalization, as the Re-Envisioning series sought to do, sends a powerful message of renewal for urban rivers and ultimately for the quality of urban life.

The Re-Envisioning series was also a multi-disciplinary, community-oriented undertaking, with 56 co-sponsors as well as the host Urban and Environmental Policy Institute (UEPI) and its co-host, the Friends of the L.A. River (FoLAR). Through the Re-Envisioning program with its more than forty lectures, forums, art installations, poetry readings and other events, the historical, cultural, political, community, environmental, and engineering perspectives about the evolution of the L.A. River were explored. Many of the co-sponsors played a lead role in hosting one or more of the events (for example, the Arroyo Arts Collective sponsored a weekend-long art installation along a two-mile stretch of the River).

The Re-Envisioning program was developed in the summer of 1999 at a moment when the discourse regarding urban rivers generally and the L.A. River specifically was reaching an important juncture. It was also initiated when policies regarding the River and watershed management, the opportunities for new greening initiatives, and the approaches of the big engineering and flood control agencies were going through changes, and when a new blend of urban environmental *and* community activism was beginning to take root. These changes in discourse, policy, and activism became the focal point for the series that in turn was also able to highlight the wide range of L.A. River-related actions, policy initiatives, and artistic and cultural happenings that had literally exploded on the Los Angeles scene. The Re-Envisioning series thus sought to provide a forum for new insights and approaches, and to ultimately develop a broader, more inclusive view of the L.A. River and the potential for community and ecological revitalization of the region itself. The process of re-envisioning the L.A. River, as the series was able to demonstrate, became a signpost for making Los Angeles more livable and for transforming the anti-environment and its story of danger and violence to a landscape of renewal and a story of community inclusion and environmental opportunity.

The Report that follows is organized by a chronological description of each of the events, including event themes, content, objectives and participants, as well as significant media coverage (Attachment A provides a full list and reprints of articles, opinion pieces, editorials, and event listings of the Re-Envisioning programs). A concluding section describes the impact of the series itself and the new programs and projects that have emerged as a consequence of one or more series' events. We also describe the next phase of the Re-Envisioning program that will focus on one tributary of the River and the diverse set of communities that bound it; an area that has also become ripe for major community and ecological change. In addition, a book on the Re-Envisioning program, to be published by MIT Press in 2002, will significantly expand on many of the themes and issues addressed in this Report.

To put the program in perspective, the Re-Envisioning series sought to accomplish what had long been considered impossible; namely create new ways of looking at, of telling stories about, and of acting to change the dynamics about an unusual and scorned River and its surrounding environment. The series was able to demonstrate the value and importance of a shift in discourse and how such a shift can create opportunities for changes in policy and activism. It ultimately identified an urban place where Culture and Nature and Politics can begin to meet.

THE RE-ENVISIONING THE L.A. RIVER SERIES EVENTS

Clean and Green

August 25, 1999

The Re-Envisioning the Los Angeles River program's first event was organized in conjunction with the Occidental College Center for Volunteerism and Community Service's (CVCS) annual "Into the Streets" event. Intended to provide first year students at Occidental with an introduction to community service, the students who signed up to "Clean and Green" got a primer on the L.A. River as well. On August 25, 1999, at Rattlesnake Park, the group assembled and listened to Melanie Winter, then Executive Director of Friends of the Los Angeles River (FoLAR), who described the complex and varied issues associated with the L.A. River, its history, and the efforts towards revitalization. Wasting no time, the thirty students participating then went to work collecting trash and debris from the River's banks and its waterway. During the reflection time following this community service activity, students expressed an interest in the River and were encouraged to attend future Re-Envisioning events and to become engaged in River advocacy activities.

A Conversation by the River

September 9, 1999

In conjunction with the Re-Envisioning program a 2-unit course on the L.A. River was offered at Occidental during the fall 99 and spring 00 semesters. In the fall, the course was team taught by an interdisciplinary team including Professors Robert Gottlieb, (PI, Urban & Environmental Policy), Elizabeth Braker (Biology), Jim Sadd (Geology and Environmental Science and Studies), and John Swift (English and Comparative Literary Studies). This team of faculty members brought a diverse set of viewpoints and expertise to the class, which was comprised of about twenty sophomores, juniors, and seniors from various majors. One of the first activities of the class was "A Conversation by the River" on September 9, 1999. Joined by students from the California Institute of Technology, the group met at the L.A. River Center and Gardens in Cypress Park then under construction (see March 4th, 2000 event) and walked to the River's edge, led by Lewis MacAdams, founder of FoLAR and chairperson of its board. For most of the students, this was their first interaction with the River and MacAdams gave a thorough introduction to its history and ultimate channelization, and the future plans for an L.A. River Greenway.

Making It Happen

October 1, 1999

Speakers included:

Theodore Mitchell, President of Occidental College

Felicia Marcus, Regional Administrator, EPA Region 9

Mary Nichols, Secretary of the California Resources Agency

This event was the first “official” event in the Re-Envisioning series. Held at Occidental College’s Alumni Auditorium, approximately 120 people attended to hear Felicia Marcus, Regional Administrator of EPA Region 9, and Mary Nichols, Secretary of California Resources Agency, speak about opportunities for revitalizing the L.A. River and how to make it happen. In fact, this event was the first occasion in which Marcus and Nichols (the heads of key federal and state agencies and arguably the most important environmental officials in the state) shared the podium. The event was also one of the first appearances for Occidental College President Theodore Mitchell, who became the 12th president of Occidental in July 1999.

Inspired by the launching of the series and the flurry of policy and advocacy activity then emerging on the L.A. River, the award-winning KCRW public radio program “Which Way L.A.,” hosted by renowned journalist Warren Olney, dedicated its entire program to a discussion of L.A. River issues. This broadcast took place the day of the Making it Happen program held later that evening. During the course of the broadcast, Nichols commented “I think that it was really a brilliant stroke on the part of the planners at Occidental College who have put this forum together to develop a year’s worth of activities that will bring together various community groups and provide different perspectives, not just the political and governmental, but also the scientific and the artistic. And there will be opportunities for community groups and activists to get together and do volunteer activities around the river as well. So it’s a wonderful opportunity, I think, for those of us who have been working on the River, to take the show on the road and get more people involved.”

Occidental College President Mitchell opened the Making it Happen program by describing Occidental’s mission of community engagement and the capacity of students and faculty to use the school’s multi-disciplinary approach and multi-layered skills to help elaborate the re-envisioning process. Both Marcus and Nichols then spoke of the importance of the timing of the program and the growing interest in River advocacy. Nichols described legislation then under consideration in Sacramento (legislation that ultimately resulted in the park and water bond issues that voters approved in the March 2000 state election) as well as the successful effort to establish a new San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles River Conservancy. She also spoke of the role of forums like the Re-Envisioning series in focusing the attention of policymakers regarding open space and River revitalization as community issues as well as environmental concerns. Marcus in turn talked of the importance of combining vision with the ability to act in a practical and sometimes incremental manner, praising the Re-Envisioning series as capable of developing those kinds of links. She further spoke of the need to establish new management paradigms while recognizing and gently pursuing a shift in the traditional agendas of the engineers and water industry and flood control actors that had managed the River for more than six decades. While the River might not be “the [trumpeter] swan in L.A.’s future, Marcus summed up the event’s message, “it could be a very, very pretty duck,” citing *Los Angeles Weekly* writer Jennifer Price’s compelling metaphor of the River re-envisioned.

As an overture to “Making it Happen,” Occidental’s Digital Media students, as assistant editors under the direction of Film Professor Dana Plays, shared their work in the form of a ten minute

video clip. The video was a segment of *River Madness*, which was then still a work in progress. The video segment incorporated source material from Grease, Terminator 2, Repo Man, Them, Chinatown, and To Live and Die in L.A. Plays filmed additional digital video scenes of the river in the Sepulveda Basin, Los Feliz and Fletcher Bridge areas. The completed version of *River Madness* subsequently had its premiere showing at the Hollywood Looks at the River event in April 2000 (see April 6th, 2000 event).

A sign-in sheet at the event was used to expand a database/email list/mailling list for advertising each of the future events. Pre-registration was used for most events via phone, email, and web and on-site registration was also available. All the events in the series, including this one, were free of charge and open to the public. Participants at the opening event included students and faculty from Occidental and other schools, community residents, environmental and L.A. River activists, and a number of people less familiar with River issues.

Noteworthy media coverage about the opening event included the Which Way L.A. program with Mary Nichols and other guests hosted by Warren Olney on October 1, 1999 and an article entitled "Drink the Water, Breathe the Air" by Jennifer Price in the *LA Weekly* October 1-7, 1999. Calendar event listings and other announcements were printed in other sources as well (see Appendix A).

Managing the River: New Strategies for Flood Protection **October 7, 1999**

Panelists included:

Kathleen Bullard, director of the Los Angeles River Center and Gardens for the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy;

Michael Drennan, a principal engineer with the environmental engineering firm of Montgomery Watson and Vice President of the Los Angeles/San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council;

Eldon Kraft, chief of one of Los Angeles District's planning sections in the Army Corps of Engineers;

David Yamahara, the assistant deputy director of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works Planning Division; and

Ann Riley, the director of the Waterways Restoration Institute, based in Berkeley and author of Restoring Streams in Cities.

The Moderator was ***Keith Stolzenbach***, Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of California, Los Angeles.

In Spring of 1999, at the dedication of the Heron Gates at Fletcher Drive along the L.A. River north of downtown L.A., Harry Stone, the head of L.A. County Department of Public Works,

proposed that the county, for the first time ever, would pursue the possibility of removing concrete from the L.A. River. The proposed site would be the Tujunga Wash, in the San Fernando Valley between Victory and Vanowen Boulevards.

Six months later, on October 7, 1999 at the L.A. River Center and Gardens, a panel of experts discussed how a project designed to take concrete out of the river (such as the proposed Tujunga Wash plan) could be done. The panel also discussed whether the goals of community and ecological revitalization could be interwoven into the new strategies for flood protection.

The panel provided a wide-ranging (though less contentious than anticipated) exchange of ideas about River management. This included information about new, cutting edge techniques combining restoration and flood protection strategies and the changes (and limits to change) among the engineering-driven agencies like the Army Corps of Engineers and L.A. County Department of Public Works. Panelists also raised the kinds of funding needs and policy changes that would be required at each site where restoration could be proposed.

The Managing the River session was notable in several respects. On the one hand, the “vision”-oriented speakers such as Riley, Drennan and Bullard were able to present specific strategies for restoration, including those successfully implemented at other urban river sites as well as potentially at sites along the L.A. River, such as the Tujunga Wash site. Both Bullard and Drennan also spoke of their own personal journeys as a biologist and an engineer that ultimately led them to an ecological restoration and community revitalization agenda. The focus of the discussion for the visionaries was figuring out a way to go “beyond the concrete era,” as Ann Riley put it, to enter “the next era, the restoration era.” Riley focused on how practical considerations from the concrete era, such as problems of maintenance, grade control, and degradation of parts of the concrete channel due to high pesticide and herbicide use, also created financial and management incentives to redefine what constituted effective river management. Along those lines, Bullard pointed out that the long-standing term “flood control” used by the engineering agencies had itself become problematic. “The idea that we can control all of nature and that we can control every piece of our environment has never been and is not now operative,” Bullard argued. Instead of flood control, the visionaries argued, strategies for flood *protection* and flood *management* needed to be identified. By doing so, Bullard stated, perspectives could be broadened “past the river to the flood plains and the watershed,” creating more of a system understanding, as well as an ability for engineers and others to think ecologically.

The panelists from the engineering agencies in turn recognized that a potential shift in thinking had begun to take place and that agencies like the Army Corps of Engineers, as panelist Eldon Kraft noted, were slowly transitioning away from their long-term, single purpose flood control mission. However Kraft and his L.A. counterpart, Dave Yamahara also warned of potential economic and social costs in any change of direction. “Our bias at the field level,” Kraft argued, “is trying to give clients what they want, but those would have to be clients able to bring money to the table.” While disagreements between the agency representatives and the visionaries were apparent about the scope and scale of change, there was also agreement that change was not only possible but increasingly likely. Ultimately the thrust of the panel identified the opportunities and

barriers for such change and the complexity of the type of paradigm shift embodied in Riley's argument about the transition from the "concrete era" to the new "restoration era."

More than seventy people attended the Managing the River session. Participants included community members from the Tujunga Wash area, agency staff, watershed management advocates, and students and faculty from Caltech and Occidental.

The *Daily News*' Michael Coit covered the event in an article entitled "Officials weigh plan to restore Tujunga Wash" that appeared on October 5, 1999. The article includes discussion by several of the Managing the River panel members on the balance between restoration and flood management.

Jill Stewart of *New Times* reported on the Managing the River panel in an article entitled "Human Bulldozer" for the October 14, 1999 edition, in which she declared "the movement to re-green the River has been great news."

Bike Along the L.A. River **October 17, 1999**

The L.A. River's concrete bed and the area that surrounds it provide enormous opportunities for bicycling for both recreation and transportation. A bikeway along the entire length of the Los Angeles River, which stretches 52 miles from Canoga Park to Long Beach connecting a wide array of communities north to south, would be a dramatic statement about how to re-envision the River and the community. In many respects, bike advocates, prior to this event, had largely ignored the issues about the River, while River greening advocates had only begun to consider the value of a bikeway. The October 17th Bike Along the L.A. River event was thus designed to encourage biking along the River and to enable those who participated to experience the River in a different way. The event involved the production and distribution of a Bike Along the L.A. River map as well as a one-day, organized bike rally and River expedition that also included a tour of the industrial architecture and landscape at the River's edge. Ultimately, it was also hoped that the event could encourage consideration of the value of that 52-mile long L.A. River bikeway.

Upwards of 150 cyclists, both experienced and novice riders, came to the L.A. River Center and Gardens as the launching place for the one-day event. The incentive of a free t-shirt (organic cotton t-shirts donated by Patagonia) for early registrants encouraged people to register in advance and helped with the planning and spacing of riders. Riders signed up to ride at fifteen-minute intervals so that the bikeway would not be overly congested at any one time. By allowing the freedom for people to ride at their own pace and along different paths, riders explored areas on the day of the event and had the map for future use and exploration. The event was co-sponsored by the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition (LACBC) and the Association of Women in Architecture. Through the efforts of these groups, 1,500 copies of the Bike Along the L.A. River map (drawn by Joe Linton, a talented artist and board member of FoLAR and LACBC) were printed and distributed. The map included access points to the River, historical

and architectural points of interest near the River, and contact information for groups working on River revitalization.

In order to get feedback from participants, each rider was asked to fill out a questionnaire at the event. Results indicated a wide range in the frequency of riders, with 21% of riders riding their bike nearly every day and 32% riding less than once a month. Over half of the riders planned to attend other events in the Re-Envisioning series and all reported satisfaction from the day's ride.

One of the unanticipated outcomes of the October bike ride was how effectively it catalyzed the advocacy work for biking along the River and in Los Angeles, and for linking River and biking advocates. Many of those who participated had never been to the River previously, and the experience established a recognition not only that the River did actually exist but that it had value for the community. "Lewis [MacAdams] likes to say that if you come down to the River that does more than anything else to make you a River advocate," Linton noted. "And that's what happened. Even long-time L.A. County Bike Coalition members realized for the first time that a bikeway along the River had enormous appeal and value." The event also proved the inspiration for future Bike Along the L.A. River activities. "At the end of the event, we decided this had to happen again," Chuck Arnold of the Northeast Trees organization and a leading bike advocate commented. "And we wanted to do it in a way that allowed someone to understand the subtle but significant ways the River also changes according to season and place. It would be a way of understanding a part of Los Angeles not well known, for so long just a blur along the freeways that intersect it." As a consequence, an informal collaboration of bike and River advocates have hosted seven quarterly bike rides since the October 1999 bike event, ranging from twenty to upwards of seventy five riders, many of them new to each event. Moreover, the River bikeway concept has become increasingly discussed among advocacy groups **and** policymakers, and a new proposed commuter bikeway has emerged as a key component of the next phase of the Re-Envisioning program ("Celebrate the Arroyo") discussed in Attachment B of this Report.

The *Los Angeles Times* ran a piece entitled "Cyclists' Not-So-Little Secret" on November 9, 2000 about the opportunities for bicycling along the L.A. River. Printed a year after the first Bike Along the L.A. River event, it identified the growing connection between biking as recreation and transportation and the advocacy for open space and greening along the River initially stimulated by the Re-Envisioning series.

Down by the River...Walk (The Heron Gate and Atwater Village) **October 17, 1999**

Inspired by Lewis MacAdams' continuing advice to "come down to the River," the Friends of the L.A. River in conjunction with the Sierra Club, began to host "Down by the River" monthly walk events in 1998 and 1999. River walk organizers sought to incorporate these events as part of the Re-Envisioning program. This was done in order to establish greater visibility for each walk and to attract program participants to one or more of the Walk events. Sites and themes were selected to correspond to various Re-Envisioning programs (for example, walks held at the Tujunga Wash site as well as at a Chinatown site which had its own corresponding program event discussed below). The site for the first of these events, a walk that began at the Heron Gate

in Atwater Village, was selected in part to also showcase the Heron Gate itself, an artist's sculpture that had been commissioned the previous year by FoLAR, with support from one of the State Conservancies. More than 200 people participated in this "Down by the River" walk (which took place later in the afternoon and at a different location than the first bike event) and included a number of first time River walkers. The event also inspired a Glendale Community College class to take digital photos and provide a text that was included on the College's web site. Attendance at subsequent monthly walks during the year-long River program ranged from 30 to 100 participants, with the biggest number of participants at venues where community outreach and coalition activities (e.g., the Chinatown Yards event) were most notable.

A Place We Hardly Knew: The History of the Los Angeles River **October 28, 1999**

Panelists included:

William Deverell, Associate Professor of History at the California Institute of Technology;

Blake Gumprecht, a geographer at the University of Oklahoma, and author of The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth (Johns Hopkins Press, 1999); and

Jared Orsi, a Starr Fellow in California Studies at the University of California Humanities Research Institute at UC Irvine.

With the release of Blake Gumprecht's book The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth in 1999, a new level of interest about the history of the L.A. River had begun to emerge. On October 28, at Herrick Chapel on the Occidental College campus, the Re-Envisioning program hosted an evening of historical exploration and revisionist thinking with three key historians of the region, William Deverell, Blake Gumprecht, and Jared Orsi. With Robert Gottlieb as moderator, the three panelists discussed the events and perspectives in the period prior to the River's channelization and its subsequent transformation as a one-time "killer [now] encased in a concrete straight jacket," as one water agency had triumphantly viewed the post-channelized River. The panelists also commented on the relationship of those historical perspectives of the River to current efforts for community and ecological revitalization.

Blake Gumprecht led off the evening by talking about the use of the River as a water resource for Los Angeles and its role in agricultural and urban development. That pre-channelization history of River use – and abuse – had already, Gumprecht argued, laid the groundwork for the River's demise. By the 1930s, when the Army Corps of Engineers started laying concrete over it for flood protection, Gumprecht asserted that it was "more or less the coffin on a river that was, by and large, already dead." To situate the decision to channelize the L.A. River in historical context, Jared Orsi spoke of the importance of the Progressive Era reliance on scientific experts and efficiency strategies which identified technical rather than social or community-based solutions for the infrequent though damaging floods that the River unleashed. "Timing becomes important," Orsi argued, linking the combination of the powerful role of real estate in Los Angeles (which also meant development along the flood plain) with the concomitant elevation of

technical solutions and management approaches as expertise-driven. Concrete rather than land use decisions were thus expected to solve the flooding issues of the River. Progressive Era experts, Orsi concluded, “did not incorporate what we today would consider environmental values.”

Noted historian William Deverell spoke of barriers and lost opportunities, referring to his soon to be published introduction and reprint of the celebrated Frederick Law Olmsted and Charles Bartholomew 1930 open space plan for Los Angeles (Eden by Design, co-authored with Greg Hise). Deverell commented about the history of divisiveness around the River, from “jurisdictional divisiveness,” to the issues of “neighborhood divisiveness, racial, cultural and class divisiveness” “The River plays a critical role in this,” Deverell argued, “and had even before the time at which it was concretized.” By addressing those issues, however, the River can come to represent Los Angeles’ great opportunity to reinvent itself. “If Los Angeles is to build community,” Deverell argued, “the River’s about as good a place as you can start in terms of public space, public consciousness, environmental consciousness, and bringing the different jurisdictions together.”

More than seventy-five participants attended the History of the River session, which was also broadcast on a cable access program. Participants included several of the students who had met with Gumprecht earlier in the day. It also included several River advocates, some of whom subsequently commented that they had come to recognize that understanding the River’s historical context was critical in deepening their own knowledge as well as understanding the limits, opportunities, and complexities of a re-envisioning process.

Words About the River **November 10, 1999**

The Poets included:

Russell Leong, who “lives a hop and a skip from the L.A. River,” has appeared in Tricycle: The Buddhist Review; The Open Boat; ZYZZYVA; The New England Review; the Los Angeles Times; Charles Chan is Dead; and AIIEEEEE! His poetry collection, The Country of Dreams and Dust, received a PEN Josephine Miles award in 1993.

Majid Naficy, born in Iran in 1953 and in exile since 1983, has published six books of poems and two books of essays. He has a Doctorate in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures from UCLA.

Michele Serros, born in Oxnard, California, has written poetry, short stories and a novel. Her first book of poetry and short stories, Chicana Falsa (Riverhead Books, '94), has become required reading in high schools and universities across the country, with a full-length spoken word CD of selections from Chicana Falsa available on Mercury records.

Michael Datcher, born in Chicago and raised in Long Beach, has written about politics, race, and music, newspapers and magazines for Vibe, Buzz, the L.A. Times, and the Washington Post.

His essays and poetry have been featured in several books, including SOULFIRES: Young Black Men on Love and Violence (Penguin) and Catch the Fire: A Cross Generational Anthology of Contemporary African-American Poetry (Penguin/Riverhead).

Ruben Martinez is an Emmy-award winning journalist, poet, and performer. He is an associate editor for Pacific News service and a former co-host of KCET's politics and culture series, Life and Times. Martinez's The Other Side: Notes From the New L.A., Mexico City and Beyond (Verso, 1992 Vintage Departures, 1993), a collection of essays and poetry, has received widespread critical acclaim.

Amy Gerstler is a writer of fiction, poetry and journalism. She is the author of nine books of poems. Her eighth book, Bitter Angel (1990, North Point Press), was awarded the National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry. Her poems have appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies including The Paris Review and The Best American Poetry, collections in 1988, 1990 and 1992.

Martha Ronk has published four books of poetry including Desire in L.A., and Displeasures of the Table, a "fictional memoir." She is a Professor of English at Occidental College.

In the Fall of 1999, Occidental College, Friends of the Los Angeles River, the Getty Research Institute, Beyond Baroque and the Occidental College Programming Board teamed up to commission poems about the Los Angeles River by seven of the best-known, community-oriented poets in the Los Angeles region. Amy Gerstler, Ruben Martinez, Michele Serros, Majiid Naficy, Martha Ronk, Michael Datcher and Russell Leong all agreed to write river poems and share them at a public poetry reading entitled "Words About the River." This event, an evening of poetry reading and song, was held on November 10th in a coffee-house like setting at Samuelson Pavilion at Occidental College. The reading was designed to identify ways to experience the River through words and images, and, in the process, for poets and participants to think about the River in new ways. John Swift, Occidental College Professor of English, and Lewis MacAdams, himself a poet who had written several poetry books about the River, served as emcees for the evening.

"We wanted to do a poetry reading about the Los Angeles River, but quickly realized how few poems about the river had actually been written; so we decided to commission our own," commented MacAdams about the event. The poets were instructed that the poems could be of any length and deal with the river or any of its tributaries. The only requirement, according to MacAdams was to "get their feet wet."

The words and images of the poets were distinctive and varied. They ranged from Amy Gerstler's lament that the River "does not have a gravelly bed, but a cement one, though we do not love it any less," to Ruben Martinez' evocative images of the River as a gathering place of the barrio. For several of the poets, the River remained obscure and difficult to know, a place without an easily defined beauty or grace. Nevertheless, the poets seemed to suggest that the River was a "recovering body of water," as Gerstler wrote, that needed to be taken "one day at a time."

After the commissioned poets read (and also sang in the case of Ruben Martinez) their works, audience members participated in an “open mike” session, sharing L.A. River poems of their own. (Attachment C includes the text of the poems commissioned for this event.)

About seventy people attended the reading, including Beyond Baroque (the primary poetry-related organization in the region) constituents who had little background on River issues. Once again, as with other Re-Envisioning events, several distinct audiences (poetry lovers, students, River advocates) participated.

Jay Kugelman, host of KPFK’s radio program Sound Exchange, devoted an entire program to the L.A. River including interviews with Lewis MacAdams, writer Jennifer Price, Occidental College Professor John Swift, and Arroyo Arts Collective member Lauri Arroyo. Kugelman praised Occidental College for organizing the Re-Envisioning series and the recent efforts for community and ecological revitalization.

Down by the River...Walk (Chinatown Yards) **November 21, 1999**

The November walk in the Chinatown Yards was well-attended by over 120 people who were interested in experiencing first-hand this parcel of land bordering the River and slated for warehouse development. Lewis MacAdams; Chi Mui, Chinatown activist and field deputy for State Senator Richard Polanco; Melanie Winters; and architect Arthur Golding, along with other FoLAR and Chinatown activists served as docents for the walk. In addition to walking across the train tracks to see the River, walkers also viewed sketches of alternative, multi-purpose uses for the land, including a middle school, green space, and affordable housing.

The walk was a draw in bringing people to the River and educating them about the proposed development by Majestic Reality for light warehouses. It also helped stimulate an outreach process that led to the formation of the Chinatown Yard Alliance, a new coalition organized to oppose the warehouse development and demand more community-responsive and River-friendly alternatives. Thanks to the efforts of the Chinatown Yard Alliance, the Majestic Proposal was ultimately rejected and money was allocated in Governor Gray Davis’ budget for matching funds to purchase the land for state ownership and the development of an alternative plan.

Re-Envisioning the San Gabriel River **December 6, 1999**

Speakers, Presenters, and Panelists

State Senator *Hilda L. Solis*;

Robert Gottlieb, Occidental College, Re-Envisioning the L.A. River Program;

Thomas M. Stetson, Stetson Engineers;

Ernie Salas, Gabrielino Tribe;

Paul Spitzzeri, Temple Homestead Historic Site;

Mike Rogers, Superintendent Angeles National Forest;

Jim Noyes, L.A. County Dept. of Public Works;

Ken Manning, Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District;

Kirby Brill, Water Quality Authority;

Ann Croissant, San Gabriel Mountains Regional Conservancy;

Bob Henderson, Whittier City Council;

Paul Edelman, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy;

Mickey Long, L.A. County Dept of Parks and Recreation;

Cheryl Swift, Whittier College;

Jim Edmondson, California Trout;

Larry Schmall, Whittier Audubon;

Steve Scauzillo, San Gabriel Valley Tribune;

Belinda Faustinos, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy;

Vic Bapna, L.A. County Dept. of Public Works;

Lara Blakely, Monrovia City Council;

David Briley, Calvin Abe Associates;

Bob Griego, Irwindale City Council;

Rick Sase, San Gabriel Valley Water Association;

Dorothy Green, President, Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council;

Jeff Yann, Sierra Club; and

Cynthia D'Agosta, Wildlands Conservancy.

Extending the Re-Envisioning the L.A. River program to the related San Gabriel River watershed and fueled by the formation of a new conservancy, the Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District took the lead in organizing and co-hosting a one-day conference on the San Gabriel River. The San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, the sixth conservancy in the state and the first fully urban conservancy, was created through the passage of legislation introduced by Hilda Solis, then State Senator (now Congresswoman) from El Monte. Solis, who was also the co-host of the “Re-Envisioning the San Gabriel River” conference, was emerging as a major player in the State Senate (and subsequently in Congress) linking community and environmental issues and identifying how such issues crossed ethnic, racial, and class lines.

The December 6th conference highlighted many of the issues associated with watershed management, recreational opportunities, habitat restoration, and visions for the future. An impressive list of speakers, including Solis, assembled at the Baldwin Park Community Center to highlight the opportunities for the San Gabriel River. Inspired by the success of the Conference and related organizing initiatives, a new consciousness and interest in policy changes and innovations has since emerged about the San Gabriel watershed. This includes the development of new organizing and outreach activities such as the formation of the “Friends of the San Gabriel River” (seeking to emulate the success and visibility of its Los Angeles River counterpart). Congresswoman Solis has also continued to play a leadership role on this issue, introducing legislation to study the feasibility of designating the San Gabriel River as a national park. And the new conservancy has developed a “watershed and open space plan” (“Common Ground: From the Mountains to the Sea”) that incorporates a number of ideas that were introduced at the December conference.

More than 200 people participated in the Conference, including a number of San Gabriel Valley residents new to the issues of the watershed.

Media coverage in the *San Gabriel Valley Daily Tribune* on December 7, 1999 reported on the conference and the creation of the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy. Professor Gottlieb was quoted as describing the River as “a place that brings the region together.”

Down By the River...Walk (Long Beach) **December 19, 1999**

About 40 people came to explore the place where the L.A. River empties into the Pacific Ocean at Long Beach. Charlie Moore of Agalita Marine Research Foundation and Lenny Arkinstall of the Los Cerritos Wetlands Task Force gave background and information on the Golden Shore Marine Reserve Wetlands adjacent to the River and Dan Cooper of the Audubon Society spotted over 20 species of birds at the site. Walkers also viewed the trash boom that was put in place across the stretch of the River to prevent trash from emptying into the Ocean.

The *Long Beach Press-Telegram* reported on the walk in its December 20, 1999 edition.

Down By the River...Walk (Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Area)

January 16, 2000

This walk was a bird watchers' delight, as many geese were spotted on their southward migration for the winter. Over 40 people attended this recreational event at the large preserve in the Valley.

Community Voices about the River

February - June, 2000

Community Voices involved a series of events and activities that sought to highlight community experiences and establish a sense of place about the River. Activities included school classes exploring different sites along the River by taking walking tours of the River in their respective neighborhoods or through visual presentations, and afterwards creating an art or writing project based upon their experience or perceptions of the River. An exploration of proposed developments of the Cornfield or Chinatown Yards area and issues involving the Gateway cities southeast of downtown Los (see April 13, 2000), were also part of this effort to engage community residents and identify a "place-based" focus to the re-envisioning process.

Included in these efforts were the outreach activities of several College students involved with the inter-disciplinary Occidental College Los Angeles River course referred to earlier. The Occidental students made presentations to several elementary school classes, including those at Eagle Rock Elementary School, Glassell Park Elementary School, the after-school program at Luther Burbank Middle School, and high school biology classes at South Gate High School. Each of the presentations included a discussion of the history of the River, student perceptions of the River, and how the students might re-envision the River in relation to their communities. At the elementary and middle school classes, students created murals, art projects, or other visual representations of the River. Several of the art projects were displayed, including at Re-Envisioning events such as the "Founder's Day" event at Occidental College on April 10th. At this event, students from 4th grade teacher Paige LaCombe's class at Eagle Rock Elementary (located less than a mile from Occidental) attended campus to be part of the event and see their display, and then tour the campus.

Occidental students also participated in the Community Voices program through the College's Center for Volunteerism and Community Service (CVCS) and the Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) which is affiliated with the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute, the host of the entire Re-Envisioning program. In conjunction with the Occidental students, students at Castelar Elementary School in Chinatown participated in a series of activities about the L.A. River. Castelar is situated in the heart of Chinatown just blocks away from the Cornfield and at the River's edge. Similar to so many other groups, many of the Castelar students and faculty and parents had little idea that the River existed, let alone bordered their community. As part of their ongoing Saturday morning tutoring and enrichment activities, Occidental students, along with UCLA and Cal State LA student tutors, developed a component

of the program about the River, with guest speakers, a mural making activity, and a field trip to the Cornfield. Chinatown community leader Chi Mui was instrumental in coordinating these activities which gave Chinatown's young residents a sense of place about the River in their own neighborhood.

Down by the River...Walk (Ballona Wetlands)
February 20, 2000

On this monthly walk, participants explored the last remaining wetlands in Los Angeles, where the L.A. River had, at one point prior to its channelization, changed course and had drained into this wetlands area. Though not directly part of the current watershed of the L.A. and San Gabriel Rivers, the Ballona Wetlands presents parallel issues about open space, urban development, and the degradation of a much abused and, until recently, neglected area.

Celebrate the San Gabriel River
February 26, 2000

One of the outcomes of the December 1999 Re-Envisioning the San Gabriel River conference was the decision to undertake a day-long set of activities at the Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area scheduled for February 26, 2000. Several of the event sponsors, including environmental and community organizations, hoped to encourage residents of nearby communities to visit the recreational area and identify how to become advocates and stewards of what constituted one of the key undeveloped open space areas in the watershed. The event included 2-hour bus tours, exhibits and booths at 10 am, an organized walk at 11am, and a clean-up at 11am. A rally in support of Propositions 12 and 13 (the Park and Water Bonds referred to previously) was then held at 1:30 pm.

The Ephemeral River: The Los Angeles River in Ephemeral Literature
March 3 - May 18, 2000

Perspectives about the River have changed significantly over time, and the ephemera displayed in the Occidental College library (brochures, handbills, reports, publicity photos) showed the variety of ways in which people have viewed the L.A. River. The display included spoof items such as the t-shirt with the lettering "L.A. River Yacht Club." In addition, there were both contemporary posters and historic publicity photos indicative of the evolving views about the River. Emily Bergman, of the Occidental College Library, was the curator for this exhibit, which included materials borrowed from other collections and co-sponsoring organizations of the Re-Envisioning program.

Grand Opening of the L.A. River Center and Gardens
March 4, 2000

Promoted in conjunction with the Re-Envisioning program, the opening of the L.A. River Center and Gardens in Cypress Park represented a major victory for community residents and River activists. The River Center stands on the grounds formerly occupied by Lawry's California Center. Located just a few miles north of downtown, this one-time restaurant and spice plant was well known among local residents for its lush gardens and open-air surroundings. But this "oasis in the city," as some had called it, was threatened when the restaurant closed and a proposed development called for a Home Depot and a Burger King. Due to community and political pressure, several of the buildings on the Lawry's property were spared for office and exhibit space for the Santa Monica Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority. The buildings were renovated to include exhibits on the natural history of the River, the Community Technology and Education Center (CTEC) and office space utilized by local environmental organizations FoLAR and North East Trees.

The Grand Opening of the L.A. River Center and Gardens was indicative of the growing success of L.A. River advocacy and the efforts to link community and environmental values. A number of elected and public officials, including State Senator Richard Polanco and Assemblywoman (now State Senator) Jackie Goldberg as well as Resources Secretary Mary Nichols spoke at the event. More than 300 people attended to participate in the reception, witness the groundbreaking, and view the first set of exhibits in the new Center, including the photography exhibit developed through the Re-Envisioning program (see below). A continuous screening of the *River Madness* film documentary (then still a work in progress) was also held. Since the opening, the L.A. River Center and Gardens, widely praised for its maintaining the "oasis in the city" appeal, has become a major Center and resource for River advocacy and public awareness about the River.

There were a number of press articles on the River Center opening, including in the *Los Angeles Times*, that are listed in Appendix A.

And Yet, It Is a River **March 4 - April 7, 2000**

At times seen as a lush, natural, industrial, hostile, and intensely urban environment, the River and its banks have been captured by the camera from many angles. While there have been efforts to display photographs with a particular focus about the River, the Re-Envisioning program sought to capture this visual sense of complexity and variation that characterized the Re-Envisioning program itself. Photographer Stephanie Strickler and FoLAR Executive Director Melanie Winters curated this exhibition that brought together materials from several photographers who have viewed the River in different ways. Entitled "And Yet, It is a River," based on a poem by Ruben Martinez that had been written for the "Words About the River" Re-Envisioning program, the exhibit coincided with the opening of the L.A. River Center and Gardens and an earlier reception for public officials, environmental leaders and community residents that was held on March 4. Those who attended the opening ceremonies and who subsequently visited the River Center during the course of the next month were able to compare, contrast, and understand the River at its different locations and in its different visual settings. While there had been other displays of L.A. River photography, this was the most extensive photography exhibit on the L.A. River in recent history.

In addition to the photography on display, the curators utilized words from the poems commissioned for the “Words About the River” event to compliment the photos, including the Martinez poem used for the exhibit title.

Creating an Urban Watershed in Los Angeles

March 8, 2000

One of the little understood issues regarding the L.A. River is the importance of where and how water flows in the entire watershed. Flood management, for example, is not simply a factor of the degree and intensity of a storm but the permeable surface area in a watershed that impacts the amount and location of runoff. Water quality and water availability issues are also deeply affected by the range of activities within the watershed that are fundamentally questions of land use as well as water flow. Each parking lot and paved over surface in the watershed thus presents new barriers for a community and ecological revitalization and restoration agenda. Conversely, each new opportunity for green space and open space, whether a community garden or a planted tree, becomes a mini-version of this new, more innovative watershed management approach.

Andy Lipkis began planting trees to rehabilitate smog and fire damaged areas when he was fifteen years old. In 1973 he founded TreePeople and has been the organization’s President since then. TreePeople quickly moved to the forefront of the rapidly-growing citizen forestry movement in the country. Under Lipkis’s leadership, TreePeople’s has pursued a number of programs and projects – from airlifting bare root fruits trees to Africa to inspiring the planting of one million trees in Los Angeles before the 1984 Summer Olympics. The organization has also hosted training sessions designed to increase the number of citizens involved in urban tree planting and care.

During the late 1990s, Lipkis and his organization helped spearhead the new kind of watershed approach then just beginning to be explored. TreePeople, in conjunction with a number of other community and government partners, established the T.R.E.E.S project-Transagency Resources for Environmental and Economic Sustainability. This project sought to demonstrate how local government agencies and residents, working together to expand the number of trees in a community or school site, can save money and create jobs while solving pressing urban environmental problems. T.R.E.E.S. aims to reduce dependence on imported water, eliminate green waste in landfills, reduce run-off, and beautify neighborhoods and create “green” jobs. The unique partnerships that TreePeople has initiated are geared towards this more efficient use of water, which is vital to L.A. River restoration. The 50 people that attended Lipkis’ presentation left with hopes of diminishing the environmental impact of daily life in Los Angeles and ultimately better land use planning and procedures for more livable communities.

Down By The River...Walk (Cudahy)

March 19, 2000

This walk visited South Gate and Cudahy and some of the other cities south east of downtown Los Angeles. This area, also known as the Gateway Cities in relation to the L.A. and San Gabriel River's convergence at the Rio Hondo and subsequent path to the ocean, has too often been neglected by River advocates due to its role as a heavy industrialized corridor, the enormous concentration of brownfield sites, and the barren nature of the channel. The walk, held less than a month prior to a Re-Envisioning forum and bike event to be held in conjunction with the City of South Gate, sought to explore this often overlooked stretch of the River. This included the site where the Trust for Public Land has been working with the community to create new River-adjacent park space. The walk went south from Fostoria St and River Road in Cudahy to the confluence of the L.A. River and the Rio Hondo in South Gate. Local elected officials from area cities and representatives from the Trust for Public Land served as docents for the walk, giving updates on the plans for pocket parks and bikeway improvements.

Arroyo Seco: Restoring the Arroyo Stream

March 25, 2000

Presenters included:

Cynthia Kurtz, Pasadena City Manager;

Mike Zander for Browning Ferris Industries;

Rosa Laveaga, Pasadena Arroyo Manager;

Peter Goodwin, Hydrologist;

Tim Brick, Arroyo Seco Foundation; and

Representatives from the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works and US Army Corps of Engineers.

The web sites of the Arroyo Seco Foundation and the Re-Envisioning program described it this way: "Just below the Colorado Street Bridge in Pasadena, a marvelous transformation is taking place. Once again streams are flowing and natural habitat is growing in an area once robbed of its vitality by a concrete channel." This description is of the diverted and restored stream area of the Lower Arroyo Seco, a project developed through a partnership of the City of Pasadena, Browning Ferris Industries and the Arroyo Seco Foundation. Browning Ferris has funded much of the restoration as part of a settlement involving one of its landfill sites. This form of "reinvented nature," to use the term popularized by environmental historian William Cronon and others, has now become an area for research and evaluation by the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute as part of the second phase of the Re-Envisioning program. This research seeks to explore how ecological restoration strategies can be developed in light of the ecological history of an area and the need to combine environmental and community values in pursuit of those strategies.

On Saturday, March 25 the Arroyo Seco Foundation presented a workshop to evaluate the success of this ambitious restoration and to discuss the next steps. The event focused on the Lower Arroyo Seco as a restoration work in progress and as a model for other Los Angeles River programs. Presenters examined the background and effects of Browning Ferris Industries' Lower Arroyo Stream Restoration project and its impact on habitat and wildlife in the one-mile stretch of the Arroyo Seco from the Colorado Street Bridge to La Loma Bridge in Pasadena. They also evaluated future steps, such as implementation of Pasadena's Lower Arroyo Master Plan and stream restoration. The program concluded with a guided walk through the restoration area.

More than 100 people attended the event, including officials with the City of Pasadena and many of the residents from the Lower Arroyo neighborhoods who have come to use the site.

Oxy Looks at the River **April 1- April 30, 2000**

Occidental College students were involved in the Re-Envisioning process by examining the River from the perspective of their respective disciplines involved in the program (eleven faculty from eight different Departments and programs participated during the course of the year). This exhibit on the Occidental campus highlighted a wide variety of materials inspired by the L.A. River and developed by Occidental students in Professor Linda Lyke's art classes and the multidisciplinary L.A. River class. These materials included drawings, print making designs, photographs, and posters. Students in the class also helped with the outreach and promotion of the exhibit event.

Water Marks: Art Inspired by the L.A. River **April 3, 2000**

Exhibiting Artists:

James Doolin, Richard Espinoza, Cheri Gaulke, Gary Hall, Leo Limon, Barrie Mottishaw, Karen Neubert, Barbara Horosko Nichols, Lauren Richardson, and Nancy Romero.

A little appreciated but significant development of an arts constituency has emerged in recent years in the northeast corridor, including the communities of Eagle Rock, Highland Park, and other areas of the Arroyo watershed. This has included the development of an arts collaborative (see River Visions, April 29-30, 2000) and new galleries and Cultural Centers, such as the Eagle Rock Community Cultural Center. As the Re-Envisioning program got under way, the Eagle Rock Community Cultural Center decided to host an exhibit entitled "Water Marks: Art Inspired by the L.A. River," as part of the Re-Envisioning program.

It became apparent in the course of planning this event, that a surprising number of L.A.-based artists had begun to use the River as their subject matter. More than a half a dozen artists were solicited and the two-day exhibition presented works that provided direct or suggestive ways in which the River was viewed through the eyes of each of the artists involved.

Hollywood Looks At The River

April 6, 2000

Completing its journey through the course of the Re-Envisioning program, this event provided the formal opening for the screening of *River Madness*, Dana Plays' edited video film montage of images of the L.A. River in Hollywood films during the past 70 years. The screening of *River Madness* at CBS Studio Center was designed to graphically demonstrate how the River has come to be viewed as a kind of raw, urban location and how filmmakers view their choices of location in relation to the actual events that can determine how the River might be seen in old and new ways. A panel of filmmakers, executives and critics then followed, including those who have used the River as background for their own films.

The *River Madness* documentary was striking in demonstrating how extensively the River has been used in Hollywood, including in those films that pre-date the channelization of the River in 1938 (e.g., old Westerns or a W.C. Fields comedy). (Attachment D provides the full list of the film sequences used in *River Madness*. Despite the large number of films utilized, this did not represent the entire number of productions that have used the L.A. River as a background landscape). The panelists were also struck by the extent to which the River has served as a location. However, the panelists were not able to easily identify how the River could be presented in their films other than as the hostile and forbidding place that had been seen in the earlier films. Wim Wenders' remark about the River as a place of danger and violence, so clearly seen in *River Madness*, represented one of the challenges for the Re-Envisioning movement. That challenge, as Re-Envisioning organizer Robert Gottlieb put it, is how to create that sense of place based on community or environmental renewal, whether for the River or for Los Angeles itself; when the denial of place permeates the discourse, whether in film, language, or policy deliberation. The Hollywood studios are particularly suited to address that challenge since six of the major studios border the River at sites that are prime candidates for such community and environmental renewal, a factor also discussed during the panel by Michael Klausman, the President of CBS Studio Center, which represents one of those six studios.

Seventy five people attended the screening and the panel discussion. Discussions with other executives from Hollywood studios that border the River were also held both prior to and following the event. This included a Vice President of the Disney Corporation who discussed plans to use its River location as an advantage rather than barrier in creating an open campus site for the training of new Disney animators.

Bike Along the L.A. River

April 9, 2000

After the success of the "Re-Envisioning the L.A. River" bike event in October of 1999, North East Trees, FoLAR, and the LA County Bike Coalition decided to launch their continuing program of seasonal bike rides, beginning with this "Bike the River in the Spring" ride. This particular tour also featured docents speaking about the various natural, historical and cultural

aspects of the river. The bike ride started and ended at the L.A. River Center and Gardens, with riders exploring the soft-bottomed portion of the River north of downtown.

Presidential Inauguration: The College in the Community **April 10, 2000**

Panelists:

Robert Gottlieb, the Henry R. Luce Professor of Urban & Environmental Policy and director of the Urban & Environmental Policy Institute.

Tim Brick, director of the Arroyo Seco Foundation and a member of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California since 1985.

Paige LaCombe, a fourth grade teacher at the Gifted/High Ability Magnet at Eagle Rock Elementary School, and an Eagle Rock resident. Paige has become a leader in L.A. River related elementary school environmental education, including incorporating the Re-Envisioning the L.A. River project into her curriculum.

Tim Ramirez, the Water Policy and Science Advisor at the California Resources Agency, plays a major role in this key state agency's approach towards the L.A. River.

Occidental College celebrated its founding and inaugurated its new president, Theodore Mitchell on April 10, 2000. A major thrust of Mitchell's presidency has focused on the partnerships between the college and the community. To highlight the college's community-based learning and outreach activities, the Re-Envisioning program was the centerpiece of a session in Thorne Hall entitled "The College in the Community." Robert Gottlieb introduced the Re-Envisioning program with a multimedia presentation that covered the goals of the program and the activities to date. The other panelists, a teacher from Eagle Rock Elementary, a local environmental and water agency leader, and a policy advisor for the California Resources Agency, spoke of the significance of working with Occidental College and the role the college can and does play in the community.

More than thirty different drawings describing the students' perspective of the L.A. River in their community was displayed in the outer area of Thorne Hall. The students stayed for a screening of *River Madness* that preceded the event, as well as for Ms. Paige's presentation.

Biking Along the River: The South Gate Connection **April 13, 2000**

The City of South Gate is in the process of constructing a key segment of the L.A. River bikeway. This event, preceding a community forum a few blocks from the bikeway site at the River's edge (see below), was hosted by South Gate Mayor Hector De La Torre and included other local officials, bike riders, and representatives from L.A. County Supervisor Gloria

Molina's office. Following the 45-minute tour and discussion, Mayor De La Torre led a walk past an abandoned industrial site, a school whose land had been heavily contaminated, and a small open space area at a major street intersection in this predominantly Latino community that was being converted into a pocket park.

The River and the Community: Issues of the Gateway Cities **April 13, 2000**

The formation of the new urban conservancy, the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers Conservancy, created possibilities for innovative land use revitalization projects in the Southeast communities along the pathway of the Los Angeles River. This community forum, co-sponsored by the City of South Gate, and including the board members of the new Conservancy as well as members of the Trust for Public Land, involved a series of short presentations and open mike discussions exploring River and land use issues as they relate to the Gateway cities. Topics included: brownfield sites along the River; opportunities associated with sites adjacent to the River (such as the Public Works yards); how to address the site at the confluence of the Rio Hondo and the L.A. Rivers; getting beyond earlier debates over flood protection versus restoration; and the debates over open space in a densely populated urban area.

Of all the cities along the River, the south east cities are likely to be the most overlooked in the discussions about the greening of the River and community revitalization. That fact was apparent as outreach for this event was not as successful (in terms of participation) as several of the other events in the series, despite promotion by the City of South Gate and outreach at South Gate high schools. The outreach in the high schools was conducted as part of an independent study course by an Occidental student who had grown up in the area. The student indicated strong interest among the South Gate students about the history of the River as well as the possibility of developing new open space areas along the River's edge. However, none of the students expressed an interest in attending what was seen as more of an official "city" event.

Despite the low turnout, a number of key public officials and their staff did participate in the event, which had slightly more than 30 people in attendance. Those who attended felt the program was important and afterward discussed the need for more organizing in the area around key urban environmental issues. With few organizations in the locale dedicated to environmental issues, the need for a southeast version of an urban greening organization (such as a "Southeast Trees" to parallel the highly successful Northeast Trees organization) was identified and discussed. From this event, program organizers learned the challenges of conducting effective outreach to a population of mostly working-class, Latino families who had not previously been part of River constituencies. However, as Robert Gottlieb pointed out in a column for the *Los Angeles Times* that appeared shortly after the South Gate event ("Expanding Environmental Horizons," April 16, 2000), surveys indicated that a large majority of L.A. Latinos identified the need for open space as a core community issue and thought environmental issues were important. However, fewer numbers of those surveyed felt they had a direct say in the outcome of any environmental issue or agenda.

Prior to the forum, an April 2, 2000 Los Angeles Times article by George Ramos, in anticipation of the Gateway Cities Re-Envisioning event, described the efforts of south east Los Angeles cities to acquire land for green space along the River. The desire of city officials and residents to increase open space and improve bikeways along the River in Cudahy, South Gate, Bell Gardens, Paramount, and Maywood, Ramos wrote, was indicative of an expanding constituency looking to environmental improvements to make their communities more livable. “Largely Latino towns downstream from downtown Los Angeles,” Ramos concluded, “are becoming interested in the river and the environment.”

Down By The River...Walk (Los Feliz)

April 16, 2000

People came to see the beautiful Heron gate, picnic area, river cat paintings, and hear about the upcoming bicycle bridge across Los Feliz Road.

River Visions

April 29-30, 2000

Along the River’s stretch, a wide variety of art adorns the concrete walls including murals such as the well-known and mysterious River Cats, and ever-changing graffiti art. The Arroyo Arts Collective, a northeast L.A. group, sponsored, as a part of the Re-Envisioning program, a weekend art festival featuring temporary, site-specific art installations in and along the south bank of the L.A. River covering 2.5 miles between Fletcher (Rattlesnake Park) and Riverside (Zanja Madre Park). Nearly 50 artists transformed this area of the River during this two-day installation, using their talents and imagination to create symbols, artistic commentary, sculptures, and other art objects of and about the River. The event was a huge community draw with over 1,000 people coming to the River’s banks over the 2-day period. Several of the artists and many of the observers had never been down to the River, as with many of the Re-Envisioning events by the River’s edge. Works ranged from mural projects to performance art to gourd birds to aerial photography to treasure maps and historic stereoscopic views of the River. In addition to the installation pieces, live entertainment and children’s art activities were also a part of the festival.

Prior to submitting proposals for the exhibit, artists were required to participate in a L.A. River walk where they scoped the location and learned more about the River. This interaction was crucial for the artists to gain an appreciation for the River, and understand the aims of the Re-Envisioning program and efforts to revitalize the River. As artist Craig Arteaga Johnson stated, “By collecting the rainwater and debris from many parts of Los Angeles, and by running through many disparate neighborhoods, the Los Angeles River unifies what many perceive as a vast and decentralized urban center. Because it courses throughout the city crossing boundaries of class, culture and belief, the River has the potential to be not only a common ground for physical recreation but also a source of shared spiritual energy.” River Visions was quite successful in this regard, bringing both the artists and community residents to view the River as this new kind of common ground.

Inspired by the event, the Arroyo Arts Collective has decided to pursue further River-related installations, including a possible exhibit for spring 2002.

La Gran Limpieza
May 6, 2000

Participants discovered (and uncovered!) the abundant vegetation & wildlife thriving along the 52 mile river. Friends of the Los Angeles River and more than a thousand-citizen naturalists rolled up their sleeves to clean trash and debris from the L.A. River at the 11th annual La Gran Limpieza that was also highlighted as part of the Re-Envisioning program. Locations included Sepulveda Basin, Tujunga Wash, Griffith Park, Los Feliz, Elysian Valley, Compton Creek & Long Beach.

Water Quality and the Watershed - Water Quality of the L.A. River
May 13, 2000

Panelists and Participants included:

Jaqueline Lambrichts, Friends of the San Gabriel River;

Andrea Azuma, Re-Envisioning the L.A. River;

Shirley Birosik, Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB)-Los Angeles Region;

Bill De Poto, Storm Water Management Division, L.A. County Department of Public Works (LACDPW);

Jim Harrington, California Department of Fish and Game;

Heather Lee Merenda, City of Calabasas;

Crystal Brandt, Southern California Marine Institute (SCMI);

Mark Abramson, Heal the Bay;

Joan Greenwood, Friends of the Los Angeles River;

Charlie Moore, Algalita Marine Research Foundation;

Melinda Becker, Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB)-Los Angeles Region.

From urban runoff to sewage treatment plant effluent, our rivers transport pollution from our cities to the ocean. Approximately 40 participants learned about the quality of inland waters and

the new pollution limits adopted by the Regional Water Quality Control Board. Marine researchers spoke of the effects of pollution on marine habitats, and Abramson and Greenwood presented information on Heal the Bay and FoLAR's programs to measure water quality and reduce pollution. Plans to conduct for future water quality monitoring were also identified.

River Restoration and Downstream Issues: The Ecology of Riparian Systems in an Urban Setting
May 20, 2000

Panelists:

Bill De Poto, Los Angeles County Department of Public Works;

John Dorsey, City of Los Angeles Stormwater Management Division;

Ruth Collins, City of Long Beach Clean Water Program;

B. Jones, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Southern California;

Dominic Gregorio, Southern California Marine Institute and State Water Resources Control Board;

Joan Greenwood, Friends of the Los Angeles River;

Dorothy Green, Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council;

Cheryl Swift, Whittier College and Beth Braker, Occidental College;

Dan Cooper, The Audobon Center;

C. Swift, L.A. County Natural History Museum;

Keith Stolzenbach, University of California, Los Angeles;

Charles Rairdan, Army Corps of Engineers;

Sean Woods, California Coastal Conservancy;

Michael Zander, Zander Associates Environmental Consultants; and

Tim Brick, Arroyo Seco Foundation

Two half-day sessions of the annual meeting of the Southern California Academy of Sciences were devoted to studies on the L.A. River and the consequences and opportunities for restoration projects. One symposium explored the possibility of restoring portions of the River's 52-mile

descent from the Santa Monica, Santa Susana and San Gabriel Mountains, of which 37 miles is encased in concrete. Another focused on downstream issues, examining the effect of discharge from the L.A. River into the Pacific Ocean at Long Beach. Nearly 40 scientists attended the symposium and a productive discussion followed the presentations. According to Tina Hartney, Professor of Biology at Occidental College and one of the organizers of the symposium, many of the participants saw the session as valuable for networking and exchanging ideas. Participants were “glad to have the opportunity to meet with others from the academy, government, and industry with an interest in or project about the River.”

Down By The River...Walk (Headworks)

May 21, 2000

Walkers visited a Riverside Department of Water and Power area slated for groundwater recharge and extensive restoration.

Making the River Part of the Community and the Community Part of the River: The UCLA Report on the Future of the Chinatown Yards/Cornfield

June 8, 2000

Held at Castelar Elementary School in Chinatown, about 30 people attended this event focused on the development of the Chinatown Yards area bordering the River. As a client project to the Occidental College Urban and Environmental Policy Institute, a UCLA Urban Planning Department team of graduate students conducted a 2-semester comprehensive project on the process of river redevelopment with regard to community input and planning. The outcome of the project was a set of guiding principles recommended for community participation for River development and renewal. Outreach for the event in the Chinatown community was conducted with flyers in English and Cantonese. Simultaneous translation was also provided at the event. The students' report was posted on the UCLA School of Public Policy and Social Research website and linked to the Re-Envisioning webpage.

River Visions: Exhibit at the River Center

June 9-July 14, 2000

The Arroyo Arts Collective, following the River Visions art installation event, sought to catalogue materials and descriptions of the installation to document and describe this unique weekend festival of art, community, and recreation held in April. An exhibit catalog and documentary were produced and shown at the L.A. River Center and Gardens at an opening event on June 9. The exhibit continued for another five weeks.

Down By The River...Walk (Elysian Valley)
June 18, 2000

Participants visited this lush soft-bottom stretch, and saw North East Trees' beautiful new pocket parks.

Bike Along the L.A. River
July 9, 2000

After the success of the "Re-Envisioning the L.A. River" bike event in October of 1999, North East Trees, FoLAR, and the LA County Bike Coalition continued their seasonal rides with a "Bike the River in the Summer" ride that once again began at the River Center and Gardens site.

Down By The River...Walk (Long Beach)
July 16, 2000

Walkers enjoyed bird watching on this stretch of the L.A. River in Long Beach.

Down By The River...Walk (Taylor Yard)
August 20, 2000

Participants walked the riverfront along this soon-to-be abandoned rail yard - a rare opportunity for extensive river revitalization. They entered Taylor Yard at the main MTA road entrance (southeast off of San Fernando Road - approximately across from Elm Street) and proceeded to the River.

In addition to its value as a recreational event, this event was also linked to efforts to organize against a proposed industrial development in the Taylor Yard that would preclude much needed open space and soccer fields. "The River Project," headed by former FoLAR Executive Director Melanie Winter, is comprised mainly of working class Latino residents in the communities of Cypress Park and Glassell Park, communities northeast of downtown L.A. A recent court ruling against the developers, the Lennar Partners, required an Environmental Impact Report on the 41 acres adjacent to the L.A. River. Community members continue to push for a state park at Taylor Yard, as lawn signs around the area demand "Give Our Kids a Place to Play, A State Park at Taylor Yard."

Mayoral Candidates Debate: Which Way for the L.A. River and L.A.'s Urban Environment?
September 14, 2000

Candidates participating:

Congressperson *Xavier Becerra*, representing California's 30th Congressional District.

Businessperson *Steven Soboroff*, managing partner of Soboroff Partners, a commercial real estate brokerage company in Los Angeles.

Assemblymember *Antonio Villaraigosa*, elected Assembly Majority Leader in 1997 and served as Speaker of the California State Assembly from 1998-1999.

City Councilmember *Joel Wachs*, member of the L.A. City Council since 1971.

Warren Olney, host of KCRW's Which Way L.A., moderated the debate.

More than 450 people came to Occidental College's Keck Theater to hear a debate and mayoral forum on the L.A. River and the Urban Environment, the last event in the Re-Envisioning series. The debate and forum was also aired live on KCRW-fm radio. Re-Envisioning researchers developed a Policy Briefing paper in advance of the Forum on fourteen topics, including several issues related to the River, that was then distributed at the event and posted on the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute website. Moderator Warren Olney used the information from the Briefing Paper to pose questions to four of the six major mayoral candidates just then beginning their campaign for Mayor of the City of Los Angeles. Alternate questions were then asked by members of the audience. Though this was not the first of the mayoral debates, it proved to be a critical event for the attention it received in identifying core environmental themes that would ultimately situate the candidates' positions in this area.

Part of the concept of the Forum was to have the mayoral candidates speak about some the issues, insights, and overall re-envisioning process that had been generated through the "Re-Envisioning the L.A. River" program. The candidates had the opportunity to articulate their own conceptions of what the River meant to the community and to the City, and to discuss the River in relation to the various policy, management, and social and cultural issues associated with it.

Discussion was lively, with far more consensus on key issues than anticipated. Occidental Professor Eric Garcetti (who was subsequently elected to the Los Angeles City Council) commented that the event for his Politics 101 students (who were required to attend the forum) provided a real world illustration of an evolving politics due to a change in how certain key issues had come to be framed.

Down By The River...Walk (Arroyo Seco) **September 17, 2000**

Walkers explored the restored stream along this tributary to the Los Angeles River and took advantage of the multiple-use recreational area which includes a casting pond, archery center and trails for walking, running, and horseback riding.

CONCLUSION: THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR A RE-ENVISIONING AND COMMUNITY HERITAGE AGENDA

The Re-Envisioning the L.A. River program was in many ways an extraordinary and stunning success. The planning and implementation of the events in the series served as catalyst for developing and extending the new ways of thinking and acting about the River, at times going far beyond the initial expectations of the event organizers. Part of the reason for that success was undoubtedly a factor of timing. Advocacy around the L.A. River had reached a critical stage. Strategies were needed that could link community and environmental goals. The historic divisiveness associated with the River and its various uses and abuses, as Bill Deverell put it, needed to be overcome. And fresh perspectives, on what the River had been and what it could become, also needed to be identified. The Re-Envisioning series was able to fill a number of those needs, or at least help a process that had already begun by providing a full template of historical, engineering, scientific, political, representational, and visual viewpoints as well as a more comprehensive effort aimed at linking community and environmental objectives.

The period from the Fall of 1999 to the Fall of 2000 when the Re-Envisioning programs took place proved to be an important turning point for the River and its advocates. The issue of the proposed Cornfield warehouse development provides an important illustration. When the series was formally launched in October 1999, the ability to successfully challenge the plans to develop a string of warehouses and industrial facilities in the 50-acre undeveloped Cornfield site just north of downtown adjacent to Chinatown seemed remote at best. Mayor Richard Riordan and his staff strongly supported the developers who were among the most powerful figures in the region. Public officials warned River advocates that they could not stop a process that was moving quickly through its permitting and approval requirements. The federal government had provided an \$11 million subsidy on the basis that the site was contaminated, but then it appeared that the developers would not have to release the information about how it was contaminated, nor even provide an Environmental Impact Report. Coverage of opposition to the warehouse plans was largely limited to the alternative *L.A. Weekly*. A number of top environmental officials in the State and the region were largely out of the decision-making loop or even unaware of the nature of the project nor of the rapidity in which it was being approved.

The first event in the Re-Envisioning series, “Making it Happen,” provided one of the first opportunities for River advocates to raise the issue of the Cornfield development in a public forum and in the discussions following the event. At the same time, the *Los Angeles Times* began to be interested in the subject partly based on interest of some reporters and editors in the objectives of the “Re-Envisioning” series. “By defining this as a community as well as environmental issue,” *Times*’ reporter George Ramos later told event organizers, “you captured our attention.” An opinion article in the *Times* by event organizers Lewis MacAdams and Robert Gottlieb entitled “Changing a River’s Course: A Greenbelt versus Warehouses” was also published just prior to the Making it Happen event. The article helped elevate the controversy and identified an alternative to the warehouse plans, the approval for which still seemed, for many elected and public officials, inexorable.

Within the year, a remarkable change took place in how this issue had come to be viewed. By the Fall of 2000 at the conclusion of the Re-Envisioning series, including the various events dedicated to the Cornfield issue, the controversy had not only been elevated but the political and policy dynamics associated with the warehouse proposal had changed as well. By the time of the Mayoral candidates' debate on the L.A. River and the Urban Environment in September 2000, the shift in the discourse – and the policy positions – had become explicit. The first question to the candidates posed by moderator Warren Olney (and provided by the Re-Envisioning organizers), was about the Cornfield/Chinatown Yards issue. Each of the candidates, including those who had been previous supporters of the warehouse proposal, declared that they were now dedicated to a greening the L.A. River strategy, including the Cornfield site as well. “It is hard to adjust to the fact that the L.A. River has become a kind of mom and apple pie issue,” MacAdams commented right after that debate. In fact, HUD, the federal agency that had provided the brownfield subsidy to the developers and had previously ignored requests for an EIR, reversed its position just days after the mayoral forum and now required that an EIR be developed for the site. The HUD decision, combined with the transformation of media coverage and political debate, set in motion subsequent events that culminated in a sale of the site by the developers; a sale that will now allow an alternative greening – and community-oriented – plan to be developed.

A number of factors distinct from the Re-Envisioning program were also clearly responsible for the dramatic developments regarding the Cornfield site; developments that have become emblematic of the sea change around perspectives regarding the L.A. River and the urban environment. The Chinatown Yards Alliance was established in this period and played a major role in bringing the various constituent groups together that were able to successfully challenge the warehouse plans. The *Los Angeles Times* began to editorialize in opposition to the warehouse development. Lawsuits initiated by several public interest lawyers on behalf of project opponents also played a role. What was most important about the Re-Envisioning program and its major contribution regarding this and other L.A. River-related issues, however, was in this area of *discourse*; that is, how an issue like the Cornfield development, including the language used to describe an issue, is framed, as Eric Garcetti had pointed out at the mayoral forum.

Another example of this shift in discourse can be seen in D.J. Waldie's evocative commentaries about the L.A. River. Waldie, a novelist and city official for one of the cities south of downtown most impacted by floodwaters, frequently wrote about the River in the opinion pages of the *Los Angeles Times*. In a *Times* commentary written shortly before the “Making it Happen” event, Waldie described the San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers as “problematic.” “The gated and trespass-forbidden river channels seem superfluous, the ultimate ‘no place’ in notoriously placeless L.A.,” Waldie wrote. And in describing the development of the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, Waldie, echoing Bill Deverell's comments about divisiveness, said the new conservancy “inadvertently preserves another aspect of the L.A. River: its historic role as a separator of races, classes and communities of shared interest.”

Nine months later, Waldie, clearly reflecting that shift in discourse around the River, wrote in a commentary, “As we begin to encounter the river as a place, not an abstraction, we encounter each other. The riverbank is not the perfect place for this meeting, but it's the only place we have

that extends the length of metropolitan Los Angeles and along nearly all the borders of our social divides. Think of the river we're making as the anti-freeway-not dispersing L.A. but pulling it together.”

Waldie's changing views in these two commentaries, occurring at the beginning and near the end of the Re-Envisioning series, mirrored that of the broader shift in discourse articulated by and through the Re-Envisioning series. As a catalyst for change, the Re-Envisioning series was not the sole nor even with some issues the primary factor in establishing this new type of language and set of stories about the River and its role in a dynamic and changing Los Angeles. However, the Re-Envisioning series provided the occasion for bringing together many of the players – as well as new constituencies – who began to see possibilities for change where the odds for change had previously seemed so overwhelming. Of the 56 co-sponsors of the series, more than one-third of the organizations played a direct role in pulling together one or another of the Series events, and thus took ownership of the Series' goals: namely how to view the River in different ways. As a stimulus for action, the Re-Envisioning series, by succeeding strongly in creating this new sense of possibility, also helped inspire a number of new and continuing activities around the River. These ranged from the seasonal Bike Along the River programs to the plans for new art installations and the more ambitious Arroyo Seco Collaborative initiatives described in Attachment B.

The challenges for the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute, the host organization of the Re-Envisioning series, and for the co-host, the Friends of the L.A. River organization, flow directly from the success of the series and the larger advocacy it drew from and helped stimulate. If greening and community revitalization strategies for the River have now become “mom and apple pie,” as Lewis MacAdams notes, how does one turn a shift in discourse into a continuing process of reinvention and re-envisioning of place? And how does one accomplish that when the barriers for change are still fundamentally overwhelming at each point along the River's path? If one begins to change the dynamics around the discourse, a fundamental goal of the Re-Envisioning program, how can movements and linked constituencies benefit from that shift? And how can they begin to undertake the actions, both incremental and comprehensive, that can help transform the River and the places it intersects to become, if not that swan in L.A.'s future, then at least that “very, very pretty duck.”

While the “Re-Envisioning the L.A. River” programs sought to address the ways we use language, tell stories, and create new visions about the River and about Los Angeles, it also laid the groundwork for making it happen.