

The Community **VOICE**

Tuesday October 27, 2009

Volume 17 Issue 37

Cotati Creek Critters celebrate a milestone

By Heidi Bailey October 8, 2009 06:05 pm

Saturday Cotati Creek Critters will be celebrating a milestone in their restoration project of a one-mile section the upper reach of the Laguna de Santa Rosa in Cotati and a small section of Rohnert Park. The celebratory open house will include a tour of the native plant nursery, an overview of urban creek restoration tools and practices, and a tour of the restoration project itself.

The milestone the Critters reached are the Interpretive signs describing the biology, history, and restoration of the Laguna placed along the project. A special unveiling of the signs will take place at 11 am. Prior to that, the open house will present special guest speakers including Assemblyman Jared Huffman, Grant Davis of the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA), Mayor of Cotati John Guardino, David Bannister of the Laguna Foundation, and one of their restoration partners Laurette Rogers of STRAW (Students & Teachers Restoring a Watershed). Speakers begin at 10 a.m. following the tour of the nursery at 9 a.m.

CCC Outreach Coordinator Jenny Blaker said though they've had celebrations for their volunteers in the past with a mini public celebration back in 2005 when CCC received an Urban Stream Restoration Program grant from the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), funded by Proposition 40.

"This is the first time we've done something on this scale," said Blaker. "And it's partly because of the signs...in a way the signs are the icing on the cake for the project started in 2005 when we got the grant."

The project really began in 1998 with Blaker and a small group of friends cleaning up an area of creek in L section. Now its grown to a regular twice a month event and has had over 2,000 volunteers lending a helping hand to rejuvenate and clean up the Santa Rosa de Laguna channel.

Blaker said her interest stemmed from looking at the creek from out her back door and her obvious passion has evolved into something she never dreamed could be so big.

She says Cotati Creek Critters was originally just an informal nickname for the small group working along sections of Cotati's creeks in general. Back then it was Blaker, Linda Christopher and Maria Alvarez who began the Critters. They had no funds and used only their own garden tools to plant.

Fast-forward to 2003 when Wade Belew and Blaker took a class on "Watershed Ecology & Restoration" at Santa Rosa JC. As a class project, they wrote a "Baseline Assessment & Habitat Enhancement Feasibility Study" for the approximately 3 miles at the southernmost extent of the Laguna de Santa Rosa flood control channel. Belew became Stewardship Coordinator of CCC, with responsibility for the plants, tools, and all hands-on aspects of the restoration project on the ground.

Applying for the grant in 2005 required a non-profit and an agency sponsor. The Laguna Foundation was the non-profit sponsor, SCWA was the agency sponsor. Matching contributions were required from the City of Cotati and SCWA. The City agreed to the use of Cotati City well lot no. 2 as a base of operations with space for storage containers, a plant nursery, and hookups to water and electricity.

In 2006 CCC received an Environmental Enhancement grant from the City of Santa Rosa to begin to install an understory of native grasses, sedges, and rushes to further reduce soil erosion, enhance wildlife habitat, and improve water quality. Now, CCC is funded directly by SCWA and has been working full-steam ahead ever since.

Blaker says they're not done yet, the project will continue along the Laguna and "continued maintenance is ongoing."

The open house will be held at Cotati Well lot. 2 on Lakewood Avenue adjacent to Lady Bug Park, where additional parking can be found.

Event starts at 9 a.m. and ends with light refreshments being served around noon.

For more information, contact Jenny 792-4422 or visit CotatiCreekCritters.info.