

The Community VOICE



Saturday October 6, 2012

Volume 20 Issue 36



The surprising headwaters of Laguna de Santa Rosa



By Michael Knappman October 5, 2012 12:00 am

Last Saturday, the Laguna Foundation and Cotati Creek Critters sponsored a public walk through Cotati and Rohnert Park to the historic headwaters of the Laguna de Santa Rosa. The Laguna is the second-largest freshwater wetland in coastal Northern California and stretches from Cotati to its confluence with the Russian River just north of Forestville. In 2011, it was recognized as a Wetland of International Significance.

The group, which included several Laguna Foundation docents, guides and staff members, met in downtown Cotati. Jenny Blaker, of Cotati Creek Critters, pointed out a few features of historical and cultural significance, from the statue of Chief Kotate to the six-sided hub with the named streets (an historical landmark), the statue of accordion player Jim Boggio in La Plaza Park, and Athena, the art project that is a result of a collaboration between Sonoma State's Art Department and the City of Cotati. From there to Cotati Creek, past the Frogsong Cohousing Community, then along the Laguna channel toward Cotati's Pocket Park.

Once irrigated lawn, this small park is now bursting with edible landscaping and colorful native plants, thanks to a collaboration between the City of Cotati and Daily Acts. It's a living demonstration of how residents can save water by replacing lawns with edible landscapes as part of the city's "Cash for Grass" water conservation program. Then it's on past the Cotati Creek Critters headquarters at Cotati City well lot No. 2 to Ladybug Park in Rohnert Park. From the park, the pathway follows southward and eventually crosses Myrtle Avenue and brings one to "Lydia Commons" at the south end of Lydia Court. This is the historic site of the Laguna headwaters area. The original course of the Laguna ran from the south end of this mini- park northward along the channel alongside the farm that borders the park.

It so happens that this mini-park has recently become the site of a community garden. In the spring of 2009, Lydia Commons Community Garden was started by neighbors from the surrounding neighborhoods, including those from Rohnert Park, Cotati and Penngrove.

The Lydia mini-park originally was a bare patch of land with a small playground that had become neglected and abused. Vandalism, graffiti, and drug use were the norm there before a group of neighbors organized, with the help of Concerned Citizens of Rohnert Park (C-CORP), to approach the city of Rohnert Park with a plan to establish a community garden at the site. The city was glad to help this community effort to clean up an area that had become a problem spot in the neighborhood. Water lines were placed, mulch and compost provided.

Currently, 26 individuals or families participate in cultivating the 30 plots available. Now in its fourth year, the park and garden area have become a gathering and networking spot for neighbors, whether gardening, walking their dogs, exercising or with their children at the playground.

"Farmer John" Fomasi, who celebrated his 91st birthday this year, lives at the farm situated alongside the Lydia Community garden and park and serves as an informal historian of the area.

John had purchased the property in the early 1950s and has related the prior owner reminisced of catching salmon at that site in the 1930s. Wildlife biologists have commented that these fish were most likely steelhead, commonly called salmon but actually a kind of trout.

During the rainy season, one can sometimes glimpse a view of how the headwaters of the Laguna de Santa Rosa of yesteryear might have appeared at this location.

The walk from downtown Cotati to the headwaters of the Laguna can be traced by interested individuals by reviewing the directions as provided by the Laguna Foundation at <http://www.lagunafoundation.org/pdfs/LagunaHeadwatersWalkDescription2012-814.pdf>

Michael Knappman has been part of the Lydia Commons Community Garden Committee since its inception in 2009. Jenny Blaker is Outreach Coordinator of Cotati Creek Critters.

Cotati Critters calendar

What: Fall trash pickup

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When: Saturday, October 13, 9 am – 12 noon.

Where: Falletti Park, off Gravenstein Way (east of the intersection of Old Redwood Hwy. and Hwy. 116, just north of Peets Coffee)

Details: Help clean trash out of the Laguna de Santa Rosa channel before it washes downstream into the heart of the Laguna, the Russian River and the Pacific Ocean. Dress for work and weather with old clothes, in layers, with rainboots if possible or other boots or sturdy shoes, long pants to protect against mud and blackberry thorns, and raingear or sun protection as needed. Please bring own drinking water bottle. Gloves, trash grabbers and buckets provided. Full details, directions and maps: www.CotatiCreekCritters.info

Contact: jenny@creeks.cotati.info or call 792 4422.

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