



Environmental 'March Madness' Strikes San Rafael

By Alex Webster, Earthscope Reporter

(This article was published in the Marin Scope Community Newspaper of March 9-15, 2004)

This month, two events and an art exhibit focused on kids, health and the environment will occur at San Rafael's Pickleweed Park Community Center in the Canal District.

Beginning on the 13th, the Green Festival will create a lively atmosphere for families to learn about the environment. The Marin Foods Systems Project's Annual Healthy Kids Event follows on the 27th. Throughout the month, the non-profit River of Words will be showing a watershed-themed exhibit of art and poetry from children around the world.

The three events have brought together many Bay Area organizations, including the Environmental Education Council of Marin (EECOM) and its Marin Food Systems Project, to coordinate a month of education and enjoyment for the Canal community and the general public.

Sandra Wallenstein, Executive Director of EECOM, explained that the March events are important because they engage the Canal community in environmental issues and education.

"EECOM is committed to moving beyond what we think of as the 'choir,' the traditional environmental audience," she said. We want to build links with communities that traditionally have not been so focused on environmental education. These events are building an environmental force in the Canal."

Cory Bytof, San Rafael's volunteer coordinator, noted the significance of the events in her monthly message.

"We need to partner more often with other community groups and organizations to meet common needs and goals together," she stated. "What it all boils down to is having to be flexible and innovative, having to have clear vision and priorities, and having to involve more people in the cause of a better life for all in San Rafael."

The Green Festival will be held March 13 from 1 to 3 p.m., and will feature food, games, prizes, arts and crafts, face painting, entertainment and a workshop on capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian dance form that incorporates self-defense maneuvers. The event has a special emphasis on recycling, aimed at strengthening the recycling campaign in the Canal. Representatives from many organizations, including the Environmental Health Network, the Headlands Institute, Chrissy Field Center, Marin Conservation Corps, Marin Sanitary Services, Wildcare and Trips for Kids will lead activities at the event. It will be an afternoon of enjoyment and environmental education for kids, teens, families and friends, according to the EECOM's Joyce Ortega.

The Environmental Education Council of Marin, Canal Healthy Neighborhood Program and Marin Conservation Corps are coming together to sponsor the event. EECOM's Sandra Wallenstein said the group chose to host the event in March to celebrate Cesar Chavez and his contributions.

Toward the end of the month, on March 27 from 1 to 4 p.m., the second event will come to the community center. The Third Annual Healthy Food For Growing Kids event, sponsored by the Marin Food Systems Project, aims to instill an understanding in the community of relationships between their schools and local farming, and connect educational programs with local farms, gardens, cooking classes, and nutrition lessons.

MFSP Coordinator Leah Smith said, "It's meant to inspire people and get them involved."

The event will include tasting and cooking activities, a speaker from Edible School Yard, refreshments from local farmers and fresh food vendors, as well as an art program.

Concerning their event's correlation with other environmentally focused events in March, Smith said, "March is National Nutrition Month, a month to focus on health and wellness. Our bodies are part of and are an environment, and if we can see these connections, we can all increase our bodies' and our planet's wellness."

To backdrop the events, a watershed-themed exhibit from the River of Words non-profit in Berkeley, will be on display in the Pickleweed Community Center all month. The exhibit will feature children's art from around the world, including some from California.

"The contest's theme of watersheds is meant to provide a meaningful, scalable way of looking at the whole of nature," said Pamela Michael, the organization's co-founder.

The watershed art and poetry submitted to River of Words is exhibited around the globe and is seen by millions of people each year, both in person and reprinted in magazines, books, annual reports and other media.

"The center is a wonderful community resource. We hope to really bring people in because of the popularity of art, especially children's art," said Michael, on choosing to exhibit in Pickleweed Community Center.

For more information, call 485-4908, or visit .eecom.net. Bilingual materials will be available at all events. For the March 27 Healthy Food For Growing Kids event, those interested in attending are requested to RSVP by March 12.