



# at the Corps of things

The Newsletter of the Los Angeles Conservation Corps • Fall 2004

## The Next Generation of Poll Workers Report for Duty

Girls Today Women Tomorrow (GTWT), an LACC program that provides mentoring to East LA youth, hosted a very special visit on October 28th from Vice Chair of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission and former CEO of the League of Women Voters, Gracia Hillman. The visit, which was featured by Telemundo Channel 52, was a highlight of an orientation for the more than 100 college-aged youth GTWT recruited to serve as first-time poll workers on Election Day.

GTWT recruited the young poll workers – many of whom voted for the first time on November 2nd – with funding from the U.S. Federal Election Commission’s Help America Vote College Poll Worker Program. “We are very proud that our Girls Today Women Tomorrow program earned one of only two Help America Vote grants awarded to California-based organizations,” says Bruce Saito, Executive Director of the Los Angeles Conservation Corps.

Recruiting poll workers was especially important this year, since the Washington Post was reporting a shortage up until the week



*Alma Catalan (L), a Girls Today Women Tomorrow program participant who helped recruit new poll workers, being interviewed by Telemundo Channel 52.*

before Election Day. Conny McCormick, LA County Registrar, underscored the local need for recruiting young poll workers, noting that the current workers’ average age is 72 years-old.

In addition to their youth, the poll workers recruited by GTWT also brought another valuable resource to bear: more than 75% of them are bilingual in English and Spanish. This skill was especially important in East and South Central Los Angeles, where foreign-born voters make up 20% of Los Angeles’ voting population, larger than any other population of foreign-born voters in California, according to the Public Policy Institute of California.

“Being part of something as important as a presidential election is exciting and I feel as if I’ve helped our country during an important time,” says Tracy Garcia, age 17, who has been a Girls Today Women Tomorrow participant for the past two years. “Working with public policy is the future career I see for myself, and working as a poll worker will be a great experience that will support that,” adds Tracy.



*Gracia Hillman (R) of the U.S. Elections Assistance Commission visiting with Michele Deane, Director of the Girls Today Women Tomorrow program*

*Special thanks to the students and community members who helped make this “Help America Vote” project possible:*

Alma Catalan  
Pat Chebac Reza  
Deb Ebbersten  
Gladys Espinosa  
Anita Garcia  
Tracy Garcia  
Shaina Gomez

Gabriela Gutierrez  
Fatima Gutierrez  
Ruben Lewis  
Loh-Sze Lueng  
Carla Ramirez  
Irma Rubalcaba  
Lisa Salazar

Sheila Villalobos  
Denise Villamil  
Lia Zamarripa  
...and Dushyant Bala & Katie Mac  
of the LA County Registrar Recorder’s Office

## A Holiday Message From Executive Director, Bruce Saito

Dear Friends & Colleagues -

At the heart of LACC's mission is identifying and responding to community needs. Throughout the year, we respond to an almost mind-bending range of requests for help. Community members ask our youth participants for help cleaning up their neighborhoods. City Council District Offices ask our participants to plant gardens on local school campuses. Environmentalists request our participants' help saving trapped marine animals. The State requests their help to divert tons of recyclables from ending up in landfills. Two of the most unique requests that our participants responded to this year include serving as much-needed poll workers in East and South Central LA (p.1), and as forestry trainees in the San Bernardino Mountains (p.3).

At this time each year, however, the most pressing needs LACC staff notice are not environmental, they are human. They are the needs of our young participants – the majority of who come from households struggling just to make ends meet – to find the resources and spirit needed to celebrate the holidays. In the spirit of giving, LACC staff pitch in each year to serve our youth a Thanksgiving Dinner and provide a holiday gift to the children and families of our corpsmembers, but still many of their basic needs go unmet.

This is the time of year when you can truly impact the human needs of our youth participants. I hope you will return the enclosed envelope with a show of support for the hundreds of LACC young people who did such an outstanding job responding to our community and environmental needs this year. They truly make our community a better place for us all to live, all year long.

Happiest of Holidays –  
Bruce Saito

## How You Can Help Those in Need this Holiday Season

As a local nonprofit, LACC always welcomes support from concerned community members interested in helping our young people with their studying and service efforts. Please consider sending a contribution in the enclosed envelope, or sharing your support in one of these “seasonal” ways:

- ▶ Make it a memorable holiday for a young person by contributing a wrapped toy or pair of movie tickets. Call 213-747-1872, ext. 312 for details.
- ▶ Share books you or your children have already read as presents for our students ages 3 to 23. Call 213-747-1872, ext. 312 for details.
- ▶ Purchase a membership to LACC's SEA Lab, an interactive coastal science center complete with hands-on tidepools and activities for explorers of all ages, as a gift for a friend or family member. Memberships range from \$20 to \$100. Call 310-318-7432 for details.



## Appearances & Accolades

It's been an exciting few months at LACC, with several youth participants and staff being highlighted at events and in the media, including:

- ▶ The local Board of Education honored LACC recycling and education programs on Los Angeles Unified School District campuses. Board Member Julie Korenstein awarded certificates of appreciation to corpsmembers Nisha Agbabiaka, Edwin Alvarez, Ana Gomez, Laura Lomeli, Antonia Maceda, Dennis Martinez, Shawn Sanchez, Cindy Tejada, and to LACC staff supervisors Cesar Maldonado and Maria Carmen Romero.
- ▶ Corpsmembers' environmental service efforts at LACC's SEA Lab and at Compton Creek were highlighted during a recent KCAL 9 broadcast.
- ▶ Ana Gallegos, Program Manager of Good Beginnings Early Childhood Education Program, has become a regularly featured expert on the KCET Channel 28 program “A Place of Our Own (Los Niños en Su Casa).” The show airs Monday through Friday at 6:00AM and 1:00PM in Spanish, and 1:30PM and 5:30PM in English. Funded by First 5 LA, the show provides parents, educators and child care providers with comprehensive and up-to-date information on child development.

## Program Highlight: New “Strike Teams” Heed the Call for Forest Recovery

A new AmeriCorps National Service program sponsored by the Los Angeles Conservation Corps will help repair the devastation caused by the Fall 2003 fires and help mountain communities to reduce future fire risk.

LACC has recruited 23 young adults to participate on the first Strike Team, starting November 15, 2004. Participants will be trained, mentored by professional staff and live on-site and work in the forest for 6-month periods. The second “Strike Team” will start their service in April 2005.

The Strike Teams will assist the San Bernardino National Forest (SBNF) with fuel reduction projects, trail maintenance and forest restoration. “We’re really excited that the Los Angeles Conservation Corps stepped up to help us with this effort,” says SBNF Supervisor Gene Zimmerman. Participants will earn a living allowance and are provided lodging and meals. After successful completion of their term of service, participants are also eligible

for an education award to pay school expenses or to repay student loans.

The Strike Team program was initiated shortly after the catastrophic fires of 2003 when the LACC approached staff of the SBNF and the San Bernardino National Forest Association with a proposal for young people to fill the community’s forest recovery needs. The proposal was later awarded AmeriCorps funding equivalent to \$1 million in value each year. The SBNF and LACC have also pledged financial and human resources towards the success of the Strike Team Program.

LACC is now recruiting people ages 18 and older to serve as Strike Team members for the session beginning in April 2005. If you know someone who might be interested, has a high school diploma and can commit to serving for six months, please have them contact the LACC at 213-362-9000, ext. 209 or visit [www.lacorps.org](http://www.lacorps.org) for more information.

## Alumni Spotlight

### ► Frank Gomez

Frank Gomez was an LACC participant for 10 years. He began with the Clean & Green program in middle school, and then joined the Adult Corps once he was in high school. The youngest of four siblings, Frank was a determined soul from a young age, believing that if he worked hard he would achieve his goals of getting through school and into a meaningful career.

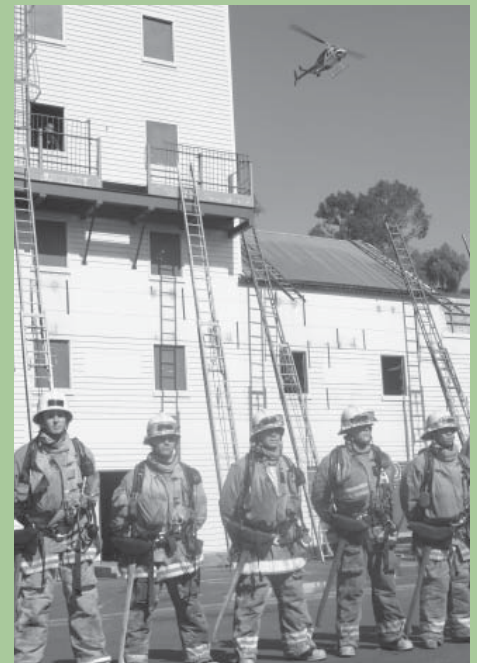
One day the local Fire Department visited his high school campus and sparked his interest in becoming a fire fighter. So after graduating, Frank enrolled in Rio Hondo College to major in fire technology. Then, after college, he started working with the LA County Fire Department as a civilian, while continuing to apply for an LA City fire fighter position.

(continued on Page 5)

---

## Where LACC Youth Are Serving Now:

- At Whittier Narrows Recreation Area, installing garden beds made from recycled lumber and planting trees to provide a windscreen
- In the City of Gardena, planting almost 1,000 trees for neighbors to enjoy, free of charge
- Along the Redondo Beach bluffs, planting native species to help preserve the eroding coastline and encourage the return of the El Segundo blue butterfly
- At USC and UCLA home football games, AFI Fest ’04, the Environmental Media Awards and the LA Triathlon, recycling hundreds of thousands of cans and bottles



*Frank Gomez (second from left), LACC Alumni, on his graduation day from Los Angeles Fire Department Training, October 2004.*

# Preserving Green Space by Councilmember Eric Garcetti



*Clean & Green students creating a garden at a high school campus in Council District 13.*



*Councilmember Eric Garcetti hard at work beautifying Council District 13.*



*Araceli Farias (second from left), a Clean & Green program supervisor, was honored recently by Councilmember Eric Garcetti's office for her environmental service work in the Hollywood community. Araceli began working with the LACC as a junior high school student, and is now a staff member who teaches more than 80 middle and high school students each year from Silver Lake, West Lake, Atwater Village, Elysian Valley, Echo Park and Cypress Park how to care for the local environment.*

We often associate improving the quality of the environment with large federal and international efforts, but community groups like the Los Angeles Conservation Corps are proving that clean land, water and air start at the local level. LACC recognizes the many opportunities to clean our green space, our parks, our waterways, our streets and our air. Their unique combination of youth service and nurturing the environment creates cleaner communities and stronger community ties. This important work will benefit Angelenos for generations to come.

I have consistently fought to bring the much-needed understanding to Los Angeles that green space and a healthy urban environment contribute to the creation of vibrant communities. I have made it my priority to expand parks and green space in District 13, including the promotion of school construction that incorporate public green space. Green space provides youth, families, and seniors with a safe place to exercise, enjoy nature, play and visit with friends. It also reduces localized pollution. It is my goal to double the number of parks and green space, and improve existing parks, in District 13. In the last two and a half years, I have had the honor of opening seven new parks (more than one of which LACC participants have helped create), renovating an existing park and opening a new community garden in the district. These new green spaces have put us well on the way to reaching our goal.

Through the City Council, I also collaborated with the Mayor, the Verde Coalition and other community groups to create the Neighborhood Land Trust, an important step in addressing the inequity and scarcity of green space in Los Angeles. The Trust is a nonprofit organization created to help neighborhoods to secure open space for community gardens, parks and playgrounds. It is inspiring to be able to collaborate with community groups to secure green space throughout the city.

While we work to shape the city's urban environment around the community's need for common and green spaces, we must also work to increase the air, land and water quality throughout Los Angeles. I have worked with the Council to move the city from non-compliance into full compliance with the Federal Clean Water Act. We must reduce, and ultimately eliminate, the crippling trash and contaminants that flow from Los Angeles streets into our coastal waters. I additionally serve on the Council's Ad Hoc Committee on the LA River. Through this committee, we are working to revitalize sections of the river into safe, green space. We are also working in the District to increase household and commercial recycling, including work on a pilot program to collect restaurant food waste and recycle it into compost for gardens.

Government alone cannot improve the environmental quality of life in Los Angeles. Indeed, we could not have achieved any of the above accomplishments without the direction and support of community groups. I applaud LACC's dedication to community service and commitment to youth. LACC's Clean & Green and Adult Corps programs go beyond cleaning up neighborhoods to inspiring youth to remain active in their community and protective of the environment throughout their lives. I want to thank all of the individuals associated with LACC for their incredible work improving Los Angeles. I look forward to watching LACC's future accomplishments, and to collaborating with the agency in the coming years. LACC's new generations of urban environmentalists will ensure a healthy, vibrant Los Angeles in the future.

# Construction Trainees Graduate from LACC's First Youthbuild Program

In November, LACC celebrated the graduation of 10 corpsmembers from its first-ever Youthbuild program. This comprehensive job training and pre-apprenticeship program provided corpsmembers with training in construction and carpentry skills. In addition to gaining valuable work experience and training, the Youthbuild corpsmembers also engaged in leadership development activities and community service activities.

The corpsmembers cut their teeth on basic construction training doing projects to beautify LACC program sites, like repairing the roof of a tool shed, rehabilitating a bathroom and building a carport. Then, once they had the basics down, they worked with Habitat for Humanity constructing new homes for low-income families in Council District 15. They also participated in community service projects, like building picnic benches at Samuel L. Gompers Middle School in Watts in honor of Cesar Chavez Day and representing the LACC at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Parade.

A highlight of their training year came in April, when the Youthbuild crew was invited to participate in a construction competition sponsored by the Homebuilders Council. The days were long and required extreme attention to



*Johnny Hernandez and Raul Herrera are now employed as construction apprentices at Veterans in Community Service*

detail, but the corpsmembers rose to the challenge and won first place with the play house they built!

Twelve corpsmembers from the first Youthbuild class also earned their high school diplomas through LACC's education program. Five of the original corpsmembers are currently working, and one is going to school. The others are working on getting into a union. Youthbuild participants have been trained in many areas and have acquired valuable construction experience with power tools, demolition, framing, wiring, dry wall, plumbing, landscaping, blueprint reading and painting.

To hire a graduate of LACC's Youthbuild program, please call Deputy Director Phil Matero at 213-747-1872, ext. 310.



*Corpsmembers from LACC's Youthbuild program enjoying their first-place victory at the 2004 Homebuilders Council construction competition*

## Alumni Spotlight ▶ continued from page 3

Frank finally got called in for an interview, but was asked if he had ever had Lasik eye surgery, which he had just undergone. Unknown to Frank, new recruits have to wait an entire year after this surgery before they can be considered for hire! He was disheartened at first, but then his trademark determination kicked in. He kept in touch with the recruiter, even though he was worried he wouldn't get invited back or pass the eye exam. Taking it one day at a time finally paid off: Frank made it into the Fire Department Training Academy after six years of trying.

**Frank says he kept participating in LACC programs throughout school because he always enjoyed public service, "and the Corps is all about helping out the community."**

Today Frank is working his first "rookie rotation" in Chatsworth. He recalls how supportive LACC staff were about him "going to college and making something of my life." His advice to corpsmembers today: avoid the temptations of partying, even when there are challenges and you feel like quitting sometime. Use your faith and both the positive and negative examples set by others around you to keep you on track to your goals.



# Los Angeles Conservation Corps

www.lacorps.org

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

Special thanks to contributors for this issue:  
Councilmember Eric Garcetti, Rosa Basil and Felicia Vann

Your comments are welcome.

Please send them to:

*at the Corps of things*  
c/o Linda Gamberg, Director of Marketing  
Los Angeles Conservation Corps  
3655 S. Grand Avenue, Suite 280  
Los Angeles, CA 90015  
213-747-1872, ext. 308  
lgamberg@lacorps.org

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Los Angeles, CA  
Permit No. 30586

## A Postcard from College

Greetings from the California School of Culinary Arts -



I'm proud to announce that I graduated with my high school diploma from LACC last June, and now I'm attending the California School of Culinary Arts! The school is located in Pasadena, and I live in the mid-city area, so I have to take two buses and two Metro trains to get to there everyday. I knew it wasn't going to be easy, but I am loving it. I know that in the end all of this hard work is going to pay off.

Cooking has always been a part of my life since I was a kid. I used to see my father prepare some dishes that were so delicious. Now it's my turn to show family, friends and the world my gift.

I'm the proud father of one (here's a picture of me with my daughter Natalie, the love of my life). Thanks to the great people I met through LACC, I'm now doing something to better my family and give the world to my daughter. I'm thankful to those people who give to the LACC for helping students like me pursue our dreams.

Happy Holidays -  
Dennis Martinez

Founded in 1986 by Mickey Kantor, the Los Angeles Conservation Corps teaches local young people of all ages how to care for the environment, the community and for themselves.

Bruce Saito, Executive Director

Board of Directors:

- Ann Hollister, President
- Dana S. Treister, Esq., Vice President
- Albert Chavez, CPA, Vice President and Treasurer
- Heidi Schulman, Secretary
- Aileen Adams
- Donald Bailey, Sr.
- Barbara Benedek
- Janet Dreisen, Past President
- Ken Esteves
- Fernando Gomez
- Helenann Hirsch
- Matthew Karatz
- Mary Leslie
- Andy Lipkis
- Sheila Morris
- Phil Recht
- Michael J. Robbins
- Beverly P. Ryder
- Ari Swiller
- Janet Teague
- Dahni Tsuboi, Esq.
- John Ulin, Esq., Past President
- John Van de Kamp, Esq., Past President

Legal Counsel: Mercedes G. Salomon, Esq.