



SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

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Over 200 Elementary and Pre-school Students Gather to Celebrate Earth Day with Public Unveiling of New Chinatown Living Library and Think Park

Gordon J. Lau Elementary School rain and garden project to promote hands-on, interdisciplinary learning with new gardens and eco-art environments

On April 22nd, in celebration of Earth Day, over 200 elementary and pre-school students joined S.F. Board of Supervisors President Supervisor David Chiu, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC), Life Frames, Inc., and community leaders gather for the public unveiling of the new Chinatown Living Library and Think Park Project at Gordon J. Lau Elementary School. The new Chinatown Living Library and Think Park features two elaborate demonstrations of rainwater harvesting with 11 cisterns and other rainwater conservation methods, Native California Riparian and Native Drought Tolerant Gardens, a Fruit, Flower & Vegetable Garden, as well as a mural that describes the installation in three languages: Chinese, English, and Spanish.

Throughout the year, students from Gordon J. Lau Elementary and Commodore Stockton will participate in hands-on learning that creates and maintains the new gardens and eco-art environments at their school. Students are also given practical applications in using rainwater to promote sustainable urban agriculture and resource conservation. The project was funded by the SFPUC in partnership with the Regional Water Quality Control Board, Department of Children, Youth, and Their Families, California Department of Forestry, Community Challenge and others.

“Until recently, urban areas have overlooked rainwater as a water resource.” said Michael Carlin, SFPUC Deputy General Manager. “By diverting stormwater into rain gardens, rain barrels, and cisterns we can conserve our precious drinking water, help our sewer systems and beautify our schools and neighborhoods.”

The SFPUC manages the Hetch Hetchy Regional Water System that provides 2.5 million people in Bay Area with drinking water. The agency also manages San Francisco’s combined sewer system that collects both sanitary flows and stormwater runoff. By redirecting water to gardens and creating more permeable surfaces, it reduces potable water use and the amount of rainwater entering the sewers. In recent

years, the SFPUC has been actively promoting rainwater harvesting and green stormwater projects to help with water conservation and sewer improvement efforts.

The Gordon J. Lau Elementary School Project will collect 2,410 gallons of water with each heavy rain event from the topmost roof, which is equivalent to producing 301 cups of lettuce (8 gallons of water yields 1 cup of lettuce). Rainwater travels through a series of cisterns covered by new redwood benches and is used to irrigate two native drought tolerant gardens and one organic fruit, vegetable, and flower garden. Another rainwater demonstration sheets across a sloped playground and collects water through a perforated pipe in a grated trench to irrigate a native riparian garden and multiple stair gardens. The Mural as Label describes the rainwater harvesting demonstrations and provides visual learning in science, conservation, physics, math, literacy, multiple cultures, and visual art.

The SFPUC and Life Frames, Inc. will continue to improve the Bernal Heights and Excelsior Living Libraries and Think Parks, which are part of the Islais Creek Watershed. One of the main enhancements is developing the Bernal Heights Living Library Nature Walk linking schools, parks, housing developments, streets, and other open spaces through planting native trees, understory, and other related elements, leading to the Islais Creek at the south end of St. Mary's Park, with funding from California Department of Forestry.

“The new gold is old: it is fresh water. We need to be mindful and creative and use our rainwater and hidden creek water productively, sustainably and artfully,” said Life Frames Founder and Executive Director Bonnie Ora Sherk.

To learn more about A Living Library visit <http://www.alivinglibrary.org/blog/>. For more information about the SFPUC's Rainwater Harvesting program, visit <http://stormwater.sfwater.org>.

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