



LOS ANGELES COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT

2013

Creepy Crawlies: Natural History Museum's New Nature Lab



The new Nature Lab at the Natural History Museum showcases all the native species that are found in and around Los Angeles, including live Pacific rattlesnakes, turtles, and rats.

Julia Garcia works at sorting a whole bunch of insects collected from the Natural History Museum's backyard. She's on the lookout for some never before discovered species that are living right here in L.A. and so far the search has paid off.

"We've found a few species that haven't really been named or identified, so that's pretty exciting, that's always a fun event when we find one of those."

Museum officials say the goal of the new exhibit is for visitors to understand, explore and have fun with L.A.'s biodiversity.

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"I like the turtles," said another little boy

Lila Higgins talks about that biodiversity. "The things that you see every single day, to those rare, rare species that we had no idea were even here—even our scientist didn't know they were here—so, you can come and make those discoveries from the things you know and have seen every day, to the things that we didn't even know existed."

In addition to all the live animals, the new Nature Lab also features some interactive and educational activities for children. One interactive activity allows children to build their own backyard and figure out what kind of animals live there.

One little girl said, "I do like all the animals. The coloring and stuff..."

Visitor Julie Jarvis gushed, "Our little two-year-old likes to run around the dioramas. He thinks they are wonderful."

With so many cool features, the new exhibit will keep everyone in the family entertained.



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Beach Day: Hope and Healing on the Sand

For Rancho Los Amigos patient Alicia, this is the first time she's visited the beach since her spinal cord injury.

"It's different. Very different. But I like it," Alicia said.

Today is beach day for six Rancho Los Amigos' patients. They suffer from various injuries, but for a few hours they get to be out and enjoy some fun in the sun.

Erik Rodriguez, another Rancho Los Amigos patient, expressed his happiness. "It makes you feel good, you know? Alive, more fresh, that you can be out here enjoying life."

This is the fourth year Rancho Los Amigos patients have traveled to the beach. What makes this year's visit even more special are specialized beach wheelchairs that can be pushed on the sand and taken into the water. These beach wheelchairs are available at any L.A. County beach. One only needs to call ahead and reserve it.

Julie Helgren of the Rancho Los Amigos Rehabilitation Center explains their functionality. "You can actually go in the water, and that is the coolest one. So that's the neatest part is that we can actually put them in the water, in the chairs. They can get soaking wet, it's perfect, and we can just pull them right out."

For many of the patients, hearing the waves and feeling the sun and the water is healing.

Jonathan Lathon, Rancho Los Amigos patient said, "It just calms me down, everybody's happy."

"It's good to be out on the beach," Jeffrey Young, another Rancho Los Amigos patient agreed.

The beach day is made possible by L.A. County Supervisor for the 4th District Don Knabe. Officials hope that Beach Day gives these patients a sense of freedom and a belief that anything is possible.

"It's a matter of independent living," said Supervisor Knabe. "Giving them opportunities to do things that is very difficult for them. We try to make it as easy as possible. But most importantly, we just want them to have fun."



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When Disaster Strikes: Volunteers at the Ready



Preparation is essential when a major disaster strikes L.A. County, and the Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) remains ready to jump into action. Six CERT teams from throughout the County converged on the Castaic Training Facility to compete in the 4th Annual CERT Invitational.

"Well, we're just ordinary volunteers," CERT Michael Stajura said. "We're lay responders, we're at the lowest level of training. But we have enough knowledge to safely and effectively help ourselves, help our neighbors. It could be the guy in line next to you at the grocery store."

This all-day event has each team competing in six separate first response categories, testing their skills and knowledge.

"Most of the time it's just looking at pictures of things. It's all classroom-based, lecture style. This is our opportunity to put hands on, and to demonstrate the skills that we've practiced for," says one CERT volunteer.

Pablo Valadez, L.A. County Fire's Senior Disaster Services Analysis explains, "So the judges of the different stations are made up of people from different areas as well. They are actually out serving the whole operation and able to rate the teams in safety, technical skills, knowledge, communication, and team leadership."

Modeled under the framework of Neighbors Helping Neighbors, CERT volunteers say this friendly, but very serious competition, is as close to the real thing as it gets.

"So we have been a little bit surprised by some of the events when we've actually gotten there, but that's part of the process; to be flexible and be ready to roll, however the scenario looks," CERT volunteer Lisa Tabor said.



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The Dogs of War: From Afghanistan to L.A. County, Tula and Ruby Protect Lives

Tula and Ruby just returned from a tour of duty in Afghanistan, each sniffing out dozens of IEDs while saving countless lives and limbs.

"She's been deployed to Afghanistan approximately 3 times, and has over 50 IED finds," Sheriff's Deputy Guillermo Loza said.

With the downsizing of the Marine Corps Dog program, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department was able to acquire Tula and Ruby as part of the new County-wide Services Division.

Sergeant Mark Jennings, County Services Bureau team Leader explained. "They are downsizing the Marine Corps Dog Program from 480 to 180. So I got a call one day that they are offering to local police departments across the country."

Tula and Ruby are expert passive-focused alert dogs who will both indicate if they find either explosives or gun powder and other weapons. Sergeant Mark Jennings, County Services Bureau team Leader explains their importance. "Our dogs are the only ones that were trained to be off lead, and we're very fortunate to have them, because we know they're vetted. They have found bombs, and we have that tool to send them out away from the handler."

With a smell approximately 10,000 times better than a human, Tula and Ruby are making the County an even safer place to live and work. On any given Tuesday morning, the dogs sweep the Board of Supervisors hearing room for explosives. "Her job here at the County is to respond to any suspicious or unattended packages, and cause of bomb threats, whether it be County buildings, colleges, or parks," Sergeant Jennings said. "The deterrent factor, we'll never know. But the safety factor for people knowing that the dogs are there, it's not measurable, I don't



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Leaders of Tomorrow: Eco-Ranger Camp Inspires Next Generation

Traveling many miles from the neighborhoods in which they live, dozens of Whittier teenagers arrived at Lake Castaic for a summer camp of a much different kind. At the L.A. County's Eco-Ranger Camp for Youth, young men and women learn to be the leaders of tomorrow, while at the same time gain a new understanding and appreciation for the environment.

"When I saw that teens were helping, I wanted to do that as well," said 13-year-old Alex Vasquez. Alex credits the Eco-Ranger camp for getting himself and others off the street and onto a positive life path.

"It's helped me because it made me get more skills as a leader, as a person. It gave me better morals about life, and it helped me make new friends, which now I consider my family."

Program Coordinator Joseph Matthews explores the goals of the camp "They're going to be doing some service projects, working on improving the environment here, doing some clean up. They're going to be having some fun too—they're going to do some hikes, they're gonna learn about the flora and the fauna here, they are also going to do some night kayaking, and they're just going to connect with each other."

Ranging in age from 13 to 18, this particular Eco-Ranger group of which Alex is a part is training to be Eco-Ranger Camp Counselors for hundreds of younger children. These youth will be taking the skills and lessons learned about developing a deeper appreciation of the natural world, and then passing them down.

Seventeen-year-old Kendall Salazar is excited to learn "how different things work, and how we can use different resources, and put it in our lives. And just go out to different areas and experience different things in life."

The County's Commission of Human Relations is also involved with the Camp, helping children deal with prejudice and to build peace. Robert Sowell, a representative of that commission explains, "We engage them in activities where they're learning about how we have stereotypes, how we react to people who are different from us. And we raise what's subconscious into their conscious awareness, so that they can then think about that, and talk about, 'Well, how can we do that different?'"



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A Second Chance: Reuniting Local Families



With his big sister by his side, Joseph Stone is walking into a new chapter in his life. Through a DCFS program designed to safely reunite families, Los Angeles County Juvenile Court Judge Michael Nash determined that there was no longer a need for oversight of this family.

"I've read and considered the report. The report does recommend termination of jurisdiction in this matter," said Judge Michael Nash of L.A. County Juvenile Court.

Judge Nash continues, "There is no longer a need for oversight of this family and the jurisdiction of the court is hereby terminated. By order of the court this 20th day of September 2013 in the County of Los Angeles, State of California. Congratulations to you all and God Bless you."

Joseph's response to all of this: "Epic!"

Joseph's parents Lisa and Archie say losing him was the rock bottom in their drug addiction.

We would live at a house, then we would have to move," Joseph explained. "And after that house, we'd have to move again. So we were moving from house, to house, to house."

The Stones sobered up, and took the long process of getting him back.

When asked how long they had been sober, Archie replied, "A year." Lisa concurred, "I just celebrated my one year birthday. That day they took my son, you might as well have just pulled my heart out of me. But, that was a wake up call."

Now that the days of filling out endless paperwork, endless court appearances, and being tracked are over, the Stones will be able to focus on being a family.

"Now we can not survive, but like, Live," Joseph said.

Neil Zanville of the DCFS promotes the program. "They emerge an intact and stronger and healthier family."

Despite the daunting challenges of maintaining sobriety and navigating the program, the Stones say they are grateful to the County.

"I'm very happy that they did step in, that they helped to point us in the right direction," Archie said.

There's a lot for the Stones to be happy about.



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A Hollywood Hills Gem: Renovating the Ford Theaters



The historic John Anson Ford Theater received more than \$17 million dollars from L.A. County for its upgrades. Built in 1920, the 93-year-old theater features dance, music, and theatrics that truly reflect the full culture of L.A.'s diversity.

This Hollywood Hills gem held a party to kick off their new season, to commemorate 20 years of oversight by Los Angeles County, and to celebrate the completion of Phase I of the renovations. Laura Zucker of the L.A. County Arts Commission noted that this is "when the L.A. County Arts Commission started being responsible for programming the theaters"

Arthur Trowbridge of the Ford Amphitheatre described some of the renovations. "We just removed all of the seats. We removed the old waterproofing that was on the floor of the seats, because the floor of the seats here are actually the ceiling for all the rooms in the little theaters that are downstairs. So we re-waterproofed everything, brought in new seats, put in all new seats. We increased our ADA seating capacity."

County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, who helped make the renovation funds possible, was honored by the Ford with two new seats named after him and his wife Barbara.

The second Phase of renovations should begin by the end of 2013.

Laura Zucker of the L.A. County Arts Commission described what the second phase would entail. "Some of the things we know we want to do is really improve the soundwall at the back of the theater, so there's a little less ambient noise coming from the freeway. We need still to do a lot of work on the stage, and drainage of the hillsides. So there's a lot more exciting improvements to come."

The celebration also inaugurated a new signature series of concerts named after the retiring Supervisor. The Zev Yaroslavsky Signature Series featured two special concerts: the first was held on June 9, 2013, featuring Mandy Patinkin and the Pasadena Pops. The second was held on August 10, 2013, featuring Complexions Dance Company with L.A.'s own Lula Washington. All proceeds raised money for the Ford Theater Foundation. Laura Zucker of the L.A. County Arts Commission: "First one is June 9th, is Mandy Patinkin and the Pasadena Pops. And then August 10th, the Dance Company with Lula Washington,"

Adam Davis of the Ford Amphitheatre says, "We support local artists. And we would love to have you come down and support our local artist. These are professionals in Los Angeles that are doing their craft. Where else can you come sit out under the stars, in a really intimate setting—less than 1200 seats, to see world class artists that originated right here in Los Angeles. This is the best place to do it. Come bring a picnic, come bring your family—it's a lot of fun."



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A Historic Makeover: The Hall of Justice Receives a Major Renovation



Hammers are in full swing. Backhoes are removing dirt, and building materials are being poured. It's all part of the \$234 million dollar construction and renovation project going on at the Hall of Justice in downtown L.A., a major undertaking by Clarke Construction.

The Hall of Justice was built in 1925 and used to be home to the Sheriff's Department, inmates, and the L.A. County Coroner. The building was closed after being damaged in the Northridge Earthquake, but this renovation will bring it back to life.

"Clarke essentially gutted down to the concrete encased steel columns and beams," said James Kearns, Assistant Deputy Director of the L.A. County Department of Public Works.

The Hall of Justice has a lot of historical significance. Charles Manson was jailed here, and Clarke Construction plans to keep those block of cells untouched as part of the building's interpretive center. All of the other jail cells have been removed, along with the 11th and 13th floors. The marble of the grand lobby will remain as well as the original ornate ceiling. But there is one feature that is being majorly upgraded: the elevators.

Assistant Deputy Director Kearns explained the magic. "Rather than just coming and punching a button, and you expect that car to come to you, what it will do is you punch the floor that you want to go to, and there will be an announcement of, 'Please step to the elevator to your right, or to your left'. You'll hop on that, and it will be an express to your floor."

Construction crews also want to keep as much of the original material as possible, which has proven to be a challenge, according to Greg Zinberg of Clarke Construction.

"We're tying into existing 80-year-old steel that's been encased in concrete. Everywhere where you uncover the steel there's a new condition to deal with. We've been able to work collaboratively with the County and with our design partners to identify and deal with the challenges in an efficient manner."

The building will have a parking structure with 1,000 parking spaces, and crews will be cleaning the granite on the outside of the building, restoring the façade to its original beauty.

Once completed, the Hall of Justice will house the headquarters of the Sheriff's Department and the District Attorney's Office.



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Not on their Watch: Sheriff's Department Conducts Counter-Terrorism Training

Trying to attack an oil rig in L.A. County is a bad idea—a very bad one. Because if you do, professionals from almost every area of law enforcement will assemble, divide by specialty, then race to the rig from land, water, and the sky.

"It took about 15 minutes, 10-15 minutes to actually respond to the actual call," Deputy Sheriff Felipe Diaz said.

Law enforcement does something called top-down, bottom-up clearance as a tactical response to an oil rig attack. Personnel drop by rope out of helicopters to scale the rig, then speed up by boat. After converging and taking the terrorists into custody, their work is far from over.

Deputy Sheriff Felipe Diaz continues, "Right now, we have divers at the bottom, checking for IEDs."

This is a routine exercise for L.A. County law enforcement. Officials say they are constantly looking at how to become stronger, quicker and safer as a team.

"It's a great opportunity, not only for the Sheriff's Department, for all the other agencies, local, federal and state as well," Deputy Sheriff Felipe Diaz concludes.

Whether it is exercises or the real thing, these special tactical response teams are really making some big waves in law enforcement.



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Medical Miracles: Modernizing the County's Healthcare System

Paul Rivera is one of the first three patients at Harbor UCLA's Medical Center to successfully undergo minimally invasive transcatheter aortic valve replacement therapy, known as TAVR.

Paul loves to dance with his wife. But before this life-saving surgery, he thought he might never be able to enjoy dancing with her again. Thanks to the surgery, Paul is feeling good, and expressed gratitude for such a procedure. "I'm glad that it's done and that people will get to know about it, because the doctors will be able to help other people."

Dr. Quang Bui, Director of the Structural Heart Disease Program, Cardiology Division is among a small number of highly-skilled cardiologists who perform this surgery. Dr. Bui consulted with Paul about his surgery.

"Before your heart was working twice as hard because it couldn't pump blood out of your diseased valve; but now that you've got a normal functioning valve there, your body is going to be working at a new baseline because blood flow will be returned to normal."

Dr. Bui accesses the aortic valve using a delivery device that enters through the leg or groin and runs all the way up to the aorta. A balloon dilation catheter inflates to put a stent in place for the replacement valve.

Dr. Bui gave details about the procedure. "The balloon is inflated. What you're left with is the stent that's been basically pushed up against the native aortic valve. You've got a functioning valve inside with three bovine leaflets, and you can see it opening and closing; it functions immediately."

TAVR is performed using only two-dimensional black and white imaging to manipulate the device. Statistics show more than 250,000 patients need transcatheter aortic valve replacement, and more than 50 percent will die within a couple of years if they don't get this life-saving surgery.

"The fact that we can do that with something so cutting edge, and provide that for an underserved population, who is just as sick as any other patient population here in the U.S., I think it's win for this institution and obviously for the patients they cater to," Dr. Bui said.

Harbor UCLA is the only hospital in the Southbay region, and one of only three centers in L.A. County to offer this procedure.



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Museum officials say the goal of the new exhibit is for visitors to understand, explore and have fun with L.A.'s biodiversity.

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Lila Higgins talks about that biodiversity. "The things that you see every single day, to those rare, rare species that we had no idea were even here—even our scientist didn't know they were here—so, you can come and make those discoveries from the things you know and have seen every day, to the things that we didn't even know existed."

In addition to all the live animals, the new Nature Lab also features some interactive and educational activities for children. One interactive activity allows children to build their own backyard and figure out what kind of animals live there.

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Visitor Julie Jarvis gushed, "Our little two-year-old likes to run around the dioramas. He thinks they are wonderful."

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Operation Safe Halloween: Keeping Kids Safe From Harm



L.A. County Probation officers initiated their third consecutive year of “Operation Safe Halloween”. Ten teams of deputy probation officers swept the County, searching out more than 100 sex offenders, either on probation, or AB109 post-probation supervised.

Deputy L.A. County Probation officer Steven Manguia explains, “the purpose of the operation was to make sure they were not participating in any Halloween activities: not giving out candy, lights were to be out, they were not to be out of their homes from the hours of 6 to 11 o'clock tonight.”

Deputies say most of the offenders had been previously charged with sexual acts against children under the age of 8.

“Our focus was two-fold: number one, and most importantly, to protect our children in the communities from sexual predators,” Assistant Chief Margarita Perez stated. “And secondly, one of the things that we did this year that is new is we incorporated an educational component that provides tips to families on how to keep their children safe not only during Halloween, but year-round as well.”

“Operation Safe Halloween” sees dozens of weapons, as well as pornographic material. Several arrests were also made. All sex offenders are monitored with a GPS device which the probation department can use to follow their exact location morning, noon, and on Halloween night.

Specialized Enforcement Operations Director Eric Newby sees this as a matter of community safety. “Halloween is a time where parents are out with their children. They want a safe environment for the kids to go out and have fun with their costumes, trick or treat, get candy. We feel this is important to assist in providing a safe environment for the parents and their children.”



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A New Hope: Bob Hope Patriotic Hall Reopens to Veterans



Thanks to a \$45 million dollar renovation by L.A. County, U.S. Military veterans finally have an upgraded facility at the Bob Hope Patriotic Hall.

Military veterans, family, friends, and L.A. County officials came out recently for a rededication ceremony of the building. Military veteran John L. Stamatiades cheered the reopening. "It's important—it's important that we acknowledge the service that our citizens give to our country,"

The 10-story Italian Renaissance landmark, which housed many Veteran organizations, was rededicated and renamed Bob Hope Patriotic Hall in 2004. In 2006, the organizations had to move when the building closed for renovations.

"While we were gone, we always wanted to be able to come back here, because this is home. And anywhere home is, that's where your heart's at. And our heart is right here at Patriotic Hall," said Robert Brown, U.S. Air Force veteran, and member of the American Legion.

One of the distinguished guests at the event was 103-year-old Army veteran Bea Cohen, who received a standing ovation for her service in the U.S. Army during World War II.

"I think it is the most wonderful thing for all of the veterans," Cohen said. "The veterans are always welcome."

Some of the renovations include new mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems. A new gym, and a new full-service kitchen. The auditorium and the buildings historic features have also been restored. Part of the renovation project also includes murals and original artwork of veterans by artist Kent Twitchell.

First District Supervisor Gloria Molina said, "I'm very proud to be a part of it. I'm very glad the County made this kind of investment. So it is our gift to the veterans of Los Angeles County."

The Patriotic Hall will now be home to Department of Military and Veteran Affairs and other veteran groups to provide various services to veterans and their families.

Ruth Wong, Acting Director of L.A. County Military and Veterans affairs said, "Welcome back home to everybody!"



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A Loving Feeling: Valentine's Day Weddings at L.A. County



Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Chacon made their partnership official this Valentine's Day.

"After 15 years..." Mrs. Chacon said.

"15 years..." Mr. Chacon confirmed.

The Chacones were one of the more than 200 couples who tied the knot at the L.A. County Registrar Recorder County Clerk building in Norwalk.

"It means everything—I've been waiting for 15 years to get married and it's just the best Valentine's Day ever," Mrs. Chacon said.

Mr. Chacon was equally effusive. "I found her 15 years ago--I'll love her forever and her family."

The County built this 5th floor expanded chapel to account for all the Valentine's Day ceremonies. On a typical day, only 35 civil ceremonies are performed.

Public Information Officer Elizabeth Knox said of the ceremonies, "I think that there's a novelty about it, and I think that people really identify with love and they get excited about Valentine's Day."

Six county deputy commissioners are brought in on Valentine's Day to conduct the civil services. Deputy Commissioner John Pulice says there is no better day than Valentine's Day.

"I've been married 62 years, but when I go home my wife says okay, tell me about the weddings today. So we talk about what the ladies wore, and what they said, the funny ones, the sad ones."

And love was certainly in the air for Raymond and Angela Fernandez, who brought their little girl Savannah to see her Mommy and Daddy finally tie the knot.

"Today is love day, you know? It's like, it's all about love today," Angela Fernandez gleefully said.



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Rock 'N Roll: New Interpretive Center Opens at Vasquez Rocks

Vasquez Rocks Natural Area Park, nestled between Santa Clarita and Palmdale off the 14 Freeway, is mostly recognized for its desirability as a film location (Flintstones the Movie, the original Star Trek TV series), as well as its geological rock formations and scenic hiking trails.

Now with the recent opening of its brand new state-of-the-art LEED-certified Interpretive Center, visitors can learn everything about the 932-acre natural area park.

"This is a very interesting project, and everybody is very pleased that we have finally achieved this day," Fifth District Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich said. "It's an opportunity for the people to come to Vasquez Rocks and learn the history of early California, and help our young children, and young and old alike know more about the County of Los Angeles."

Russ Guiney, Director of L.A. County's Department of Parks and Recreation explains the historical context. "Well, they can look forward to a real simple explanation of how these plate tectonics formed, the geology that you see here. But also a lot of interesting thing about the animals and plants that live here, and about the indigenous people, and then the pioneer settlers that came here."

The new interpretive center features some of the slithering animals that can be found walking along the many Vasquez Rocks trails.

Park Ranger Goodwyn explains the benefit of this information: "Especially for safety. You have a rattlesnake and a gopher snake, so they can see the comparison, so when they're out on the trails they know what to look for to be safe."

Highland Park's Steven Linsley, who was on hand with his daughter Ondine, says places like Vasquez Rocks are an important part of L.A. County. "Cause it's a place that preserves nature and animals and things that are disappearing, so our kids can come out and see them and experience them."

When the park is not hosting Hollywood films and TV shows, it sees more than 100,000 visitors a year. These visitors now have much more to look forward to when visiting this L.A. County hidden gem.