



Environmental education through action

# KIDS for the BAY

## Newsletter

Spring 2010

[www.kidsforthebay.org](http://www.kidsforthebay.org)

A Project of Earth Island Institute

## KIDS for the BAY Wins the California Governor's Award for Environmental and Economic Leadership 2009

**O**n September 30, 2009, KIDS for the BAY received **California's highest and most prestigious environmental honor: the Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award (GEELA)** in the Children's Environmental Education category.

The GEELA recognizes individuals, organizations and businesses that have demonstrated exceptional leadership for voluntary achievements in conserving California's resources, protecting and enhancing the environment and building public-private partnerships. Executive Director Mandi Billinge had the exciting

opportunity to travel to Los Angeles to attend the reception, held at the Governor's Global Climate Summit 2, and receive the award from California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Since 1992 KIDS for the BAY has delivered environmental education programs to 48,000 school students and engaged over 6,000 parents. We have also provided curricula, resources and training to 2,200 teachers. KIDS for the BAY is honored to receive state-wide recognition for our important work in delivering quality environmental and science education to our under-funded, under-resourced public elementary schools. ♦



*Executive Director Mandi Billinge meets California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger at the GEELA Ceremony*

## Message from Mandi Billinge, Executive Director

**F**lying to Los Angeles, staying in a beautiful hotel with a view of the Hollywood Hills and being presented with an award by California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger was definitely one of the highlights of my many years of work for KIDS for the BAY! The Governor was very sincere as he presented the awards, especially when he talked about how the majority of his work is signing bills, but the real work for the environment is being carried out every day by hardworking people all over the state of California. Governor Schwarzenegger said that it was his honor to recognize some of these people with the Governor's Award for Environmental and Economic Leadership.

It was certainly very exciting to meet a former movie star, but I do agree with the Governor — the real work for the environment is being done by hardworking people every day and I am just as excited to meet the KIDS for the BAY students who are doing that work. The way our students' faces light up when they have the chance to get out of the classroom and go on a field trip is always a highlight. It is so special to witness the

joy and wonder our students experience as they explore a creek, plant a tree or discover a salamander for the first time. Every time I visit a classroom and see our students engaged in hands-on science activities, learning about how they can help the environment, I am re-inspired by our work. Every KIDS for the BAY student who is in turn inspired to clean up their school neighborhood, reduce, reuse, recycle and rot, improve their water conservation methods and take numerous other personal and local actions, is doing the real work for the environment and inspiring others to do the same.

In the 2009-2010 school year, 3,360 students and 113 teachers participating in KIDS for the BAY programs will become a part of our work for the environment. This issue of our newsletter focuses on some of our program highlights, our partnerships and the special people who make our work possible. As you read these articles I hope you will also be inspired by the work of our students and all the other hardworking people who contribute to the success of KIDS for the BAY. They are doing the real work for the environment every day. ♦

### KIDS for the BAY Staff

Mandi Billinge  
*Executive Director/Founder*

Sheela Shankar  
*Associate Director*

Jonah Landor-Yamagata  
*Program Director*

Krista Mendelsohn  
*Program Director*

Deborah Zierten  
*Program Director*

Chanthy An  
*Program Coordinator*

Kristen Bunting  
*Office/Development Assistant*

#### Advisory Board Members

Leilani Alo,  
*Advisory Board President*

Laura Prival  
Sumana Rao  
Brenda Salgado



*KIDS for the BAY Staff 2010, from left to right: Deborah Zierten, Sheela Shankar, Mandi Billinge, Jonah Landor-Yamagata, Chanthy An, Kristen Bunting, Krista Mendelsohn*

### Welcome to Chanthy An and Kristen Bunting

Chanthy An began working with KIDS for the BAY (KftB) in fall 2009 as a Program Coordinator. Chanthy has many years of experience teaching environmental education and a B.S. in Environmental Geography from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. She is fluent in Cambodian and comes to KftB with a strong commitment to multicultural environmental education and environmental justice.

Kristen joined KftB in fall 2009 as our Office/Development Assistant with experience in both office management and fundraising. Kristen is currently pursuing a degree in Biology from Contra Costa College and plans to become an environmental educator. ♦



## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## KIDS for the BAY Teacher Transforms School Environment

Walking into the kindergarten playground at Ascend Elementary School in Oakland, you are immediately transported to the shores of the San Francisco Bay. You are surrounded by a beautiful bay mural with sea anemones nestled in tide pools and sea lions playing in open waters. Great blue herons explore the reeds of a marshland. Crabs and shorebirds scurry across a sandy beach. Your bay experience doesn't stop there. Lining the school's hallways are hand-drawn pictures of bay animals and students' messages about how to protect our precious bay waters. Inside the classrooms, from the floor to the ceiling, San Francisco Bay estuary animals are artistically replicated with colorful drawings of their special habitats.

This transformation of the Ascend Elementary School environment is a result of the work of teacher Marta Eckert-Mills. Marta participated in the KIDS for the BAY (KftB) Summer Academy for Educators in June 2008. She used the knowledge and skills she learned from the Academy to transform a low-income school, adjacent to the BART tracks in the Fruitvale District of Oakland, into a place to experience the wonders of the San Francisco Bay. In the spring of 2009, Marta and two other teachers collaborated to teach a thematic five-month long interdisciplinary unit on the Animals of the Bay.

"The KIDS for the BAY Summer Academy was 100% the inspiration for the Animals of the Bay unit!" exclaimed Marta. "The Summer

Academy for Educators gave me all the tools and ideas for lessons for the project." As a first year teacher Marta was excited for the opportunity to learn how to incor-

few books about the bay or the animals found in bay habitats. The stipend I received from KftB went to buy books for the students to use throughout the project and teacher resources so we could educate ourselves on what we were teaching the students," said Marta.

When asked how the unit has impacted her students, Marta commented on the connection the students now feel with their environment. "Many students in



porate environmental education in the classroom. "I have always had an interest in water issues and have some experience working in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, but I am new to the San Francisco Bay Area and knew nothing about this unique and beautiful habitat before I attended the KIDS for the BAY Summer Academy."

Each participant in the Summer Academy received an equipment stipend. "Our classroom had very

my class have parents whose work is associated with the bay. After learning about the unique San Francisco Bay ecosystem so close to where they live, these students feel pride in the work of their families and tell other students about their connection to the bay." For years to come kindergarten classes will learn about the animals of the San Francisco Bay from the colorful mural in their playground. It leaves a lasting impact on everyone who experiences Ascend Elementary School.

**Written by Deborah Zierten,  
KftB Program Director**

Continued on page 4

# KIDS for the BAY Guardian Award 2010

"I first met Jane Barrett seventeen years ago when she was a teacher at Malcolm X Elementary School in Berkeley and I was just starting out with the idea for KIDS for the BAY. I was always so impressed with Jane's energy, her commitment to environmental education and her openness to trying all my new ideas with her students! She always had a smile, was extremely organized for all our activities and field trips and greeted every new experience with enthusiasm.

Now retired, Jane is still very energetic and active. She regularly plays tennis, goes hiking and travels the world. She also volunteers with several nonprofits. Her enthusiasm for KIDS for the BAY continues and she has generously supported our work for many years. She has also invited other potential donors to give to KIDS for the BAY and attended our special events.

We are honored to recognize Jane as the KIDS for the BAY Guardian 2010. Thank you Jane for the many years of support and inspiration that you have given to KIDS for the BAY!"

— Mandi Billinge, Executive Director/Founder, KIDS for the BAY

"I am so pleased to see KIDS for the BAY expand to so many school districts and become a nationally recognized environmental education organization. It certainly shows what a lot of hard work, enthusiasm and dedication can do for the field of science education. Thank you so much for the KIDS for the BAY Guardian Award. It is very appreciated. I wish you every continued success!"

— Jane Barrett, KftB Donor/  
Former KftB Teacher,  
Berkeley, California



KIDS for the BAY  
Guardian Award Recipient  
Jane Barrett

## Students Help Secure Funding for the Refugio Creek Watershed Vision Plan

Fourth grade students from Ohlone Elementary School in Hercules adopted both Ohlone and Refugio Creeks when they participated in the KIDS for the BAY (KftB) Watershed Action Program. Ohlone Creek, which is a tributary of Refugio Creek, and Refugio Creek itself are within walking distance of the school and create a perfect setting for close-up encounters with a natural watershed habitat.



Students test the water quality of Refugio Creek

Ohlone School students and their teachers learned all about the habitats of their local creeks and how these connect with the school neighborhood and the San Francisco Bay. They learned about storm drain pollution and how to prevent it, alternatives to pesticide use and

environmental justice leaders who work on watershed issues. The students found nine storm drains that drained to the creeks within a few blocks of their school and completed clean-up projects around the school neighborhood to prevent garbage from entering the creeks.

Sometimes class projects have a much larger impact than the students could ever have imagined.

After completing water quality testing and creek surveys to assess the health of Ohlone and Refugio Creeks, concern for the creeks motivated students to write persuasive letters to city officials about the importance of the creek habitats and their interest in helping improve the health of the local watershed.

These letters were later used by the City of Hercules in a grant proposal package to Common Sense California and resulted in the City receiving a \$25,000 grant to develop the Refugio Creek Watershed Visioning Plan. The plan includes creating creek-side trails, improving creek access, implementing restoration projects and increasing education and outreach. Ariel



Students clean up their school grounds and complete Urban Runoff Pollution Surveys

"I am excited about having KIDS for the BAY at Ohlone Elementary School. The Watershed Action Program makes it possible for students to become more aware of their surroundings and take ownership of their local environment. The creek is such an underutilized resource. It is in our back yard and I am glad that we are finally taking advantage of it."

— Liz Lonsdale, Principal, Ohlone School, Hercules

Mercado, Redevelopment Analyst for the City of Hercules, explained to KIDS for the BAY that the letters from our students were a catalyst for the city to take this level of interest in Refugio Creek.

Well done Ohlone School students – you have inspired the whole city to work with you to improve the health of your watershed!



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS continued**Growing Stronger – Jefferson Elementary School receives a matching grant for the Urban Wilderness Classroom**

In May 2009, KIDS for the BAY invited Ken Blum, consultant for the Dean Witter Foundation, to visit the Urban Wilderness Classroom at Jefferson Elementary School in San Leandro. This school yard wilderness was developed by KIDS for the BAY with Jefferson Elementary School and was initially funded by the Dean Witter Foundation, the Ark Foundation and the Lowell Berry Foundation. Mr. Blum was so impressed with the outdoor classroom that another grant was awarded – this time a matching grant directly to Jefferson Elementary School to continue the program as an integral part of the school curriculum and culture. Jefferson Elementary School has raised \$15,000, which has been matched by the Dean Witter Foundation for a total of \$30,000, to successfully continue the Urban Wilderness Classroom this year and beyond.



*Jefferson Elementary School students plant the first tree in the Urban Wilderness Classroom, with KftB Associate Director Sheela Shankar, KftB Program Director Sayo Costantino and Jefferson School Principal Ruben Aurelio*

School community. One consistent comment from the teachers at Jefferson Elementary School is how engaged their students are when participating in the Urban Wilderness Classroom Program, especially when the class is out in the garden. The garden provides a place where students who sometimes struggle academically within the traditional classroom

are able to thrive. Jefferson Elementary School Principal Ruben Aurelio pointed out that for many students the Urban Wilderness Classroom Program gives them an opportunity to succeed in school. Mr. Aurelio shared, "The garden is especially important for students who are struggling academically. In the garden they are focused and engaged. They are able to use their success in the garden and translate that into success in the classroom."

Jefferson Elementary School parent volunteer Mark Montoya recently received a "Certificate of Commendation" from the San Leandro School Board for his "relentless passion for students that drives the Jefferson PTA". Much of Mark's work with the PTA has focused on fundraising for and volunteering in the Urban Wilderness Classroom.

*"The students and teachers at Jefferson have done an amazing job transforming a cement playground into a thriving and diverse garden," said Mr. Blum. "The Foundation is impressed with the guidance provided by KIDS for the BAY and the commitment of the entire Jefferson School community to launch and sustain this hands-on environmental education program for the students."*

The beautiful, outdoor living classroom is having a huge impact on the Jefferson Elementary



*Jefferson Elementary School students take care of their Urban Wilderness Classroom garden*

*"Parents are encouraged to spend time with our students working in the garden," said Principal Aurelio. "It's a sanctuary. It's a place for all the kids to get their hands dirty and experience success."*

Many thanks to the Dean Witter Foundation for contributing the funds that are enabling Jefferson Elementary School to completely integrate the Urban Wilderness Classroom into their school wide curriculum and culture! ♦

## PARTNERSHIPS

### Watershed Action Program

The KIDS for the BAY (KftB) Watershed Action Program is now in its eighth year thanks to the support and commitment of several key funders. In the Watershed Action Program, KftB partners with third through fifth grade classes to adopt, study, clean-up and restore creek, bay and ocean habitats within the school watershed.

### Contra Costa Clean Water Program: Seven-Year Partnership with KIDS for the BAY

Since 2004 the Contra Costa Clean Water Program and its city partners have funded the KftB Watershed Action Program for schools in Contra Costa County. City and town partners over the past seven years have included: Antioch, Danville, El Cerrito, Hercules, Lafayette, Martinez, Moraga, Pinole, Pittsburg, Pleasant Hill, Richmond and San Pablo.



### Cedar Tree Foundation: Five-Year Partnership with KIDS for the BAY

In November 2009 KIDS for the BAY was awarded a three-year grant from the Cedar Tree Foundation for our Watershed Action Program. This grant will build on the success of the previous two-year grant from Cedar Tree in 2007.



### Yahoo! Employee Foundation: New Funder in 2009

In 2009 the Yahoo! Employee Foundation awarded a new grant to KftB to deliver our Watershed Action Program to low-income, urban schools in Oakland. A special thank you to Kalyan Ayloo, Senior Engineer at Yahoo! who is a volunteer with KftB and our Employee Champion for Yahoo!



### KIDS for the BAY/NOAA/John Muir Elementary School Partnership for the new School Wide Watershed Action Program

Seventeen years ago KIDS for the BAY Executive Director and Founder Mandi Billinge was invited to John Muir Elementary School in Berkeley to help develop a School Wide Creek Program. Harwood Creek flows from the Berkeley hills through the school grounds on its way to the San Francisco Bay. The creek section at the school site was unsafe and inaccessible due to fallen trees, broken glass and no pathways to access the water. Mandi led a movement to clean up and restore the school creek area and to turn it into a living laboratory for studying hands-on science.



*Mandi Billinge and John Muir School students  
plant trees at Harwood Creek in 1993.*

Every class at John Muir School participated in a KftB creek program designed to teach California Science Standards. Every student planted a native plant beside Harwood Creek during one of their creek lessons. At the Creek Opening Ceremony in 1993, a red alder tree was planted that was around two feet tall. Every student walked past the tree, placed some soil in the hole and made a wish for the tree to grow. Those wishes worked! Now the red alder is over 20 feet tall and provides beauty, shade and wildlife habitat.

Returning to John Muir School so many years after beginning that program, Mandi was delighted to see that the creek habitat is thriving and well cared for. Many of the plants planted so long ago are now an integral part of the riparian area. The circle-of-logs classroom, pond and butterfly garden that KIDS for the BAY created with John Muir students and teachers are all being used. There are more pathways and creek access available and the whole area looks wonderful!

John Muir School in Berkeley will be the partner school for our new School Wide Watershed Action Program (SW WAP). KftB will teach every class in the school about Harwood Creek and how it connects the school neighborhood with the San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean. Students will learn about

*"I do look forward to our school community working  
with KIDS for the BAY."*

*— Javier Mendieta, Principal, John Muir  
Elementary School, Berkeley*

their entire watershed environment and about the connection between their local Harwood Creek and the fascinating National Marine Sanctuaries just outside the Golden Gate Bridge.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Bay Watershed Education and Training Program (B-WET) has awarded a three-year grant to KftB for the SW WAP. KftB will work with the students, teachers, parents and principal of John Muir School to teach classroom lessons, lead field trips and facilitate action projects that center around a focus question. Each grade level will adopt a particular watershed habitat to explore, protect and restore. KftB will set up an equipment resource center at John Muir School and provide all the tools needed for the school to continue the SW WAP after the three years of programming.

# Thank you

## to our generous funders and donors in 2009

### **Foundations, Corporations, Public Agencies and Other Funders**

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## Aquatic Science Adventure Summer Camp Celebrates Tenth Anniversary!

In 1990 KIDS for the BAY began offering our hands-on, outdoor summer camps in the diverse ecosystems of the San Francisco Bay. Through the years we have enhanced and fine-tuned our program and we are now looking forward to our best summer yet – full of scientific inquiry and outdoor adventure, with new activities for 2010.

In our summer camp children will explore the outdoors, investigate unique habitats and study interesting organisms while learning how to protect and care for the local environment. Our professional and experienced KIDS for the BAY staff will create a safe and exciting learning community for all campers. To register, please visit our website at [www.kidsforthebay.org](http://www.kidsforthebay.org). For more information, or to have a brochure mailed to you, please call KIDS for the BAY at (510) 985-1602.

Remember – our camps fill up quickly so register now to reserve your place!

### KIDS for the BAY 2010 Summer Camp Schedule

#### East Bay Aquatic Science Adventure Camp

##### Ages 5-7:

June 14 – June 18

June 21 – June 25

June 28 – July 2

July 12 – July 16

July 19 – July 23

July 26 – July 30

##### Ages 8-10:

June 21 – June 25

June 28 – July 2

July 12 – July 16

July 19 – July 23

July 26 – July 30



*Campers learn about the wild world of squid at the Berkeley Marina*



*Young aquatic scientists investigate a pond ecosystem in Tilden Park*



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