

## River greenway stretch to open

Daily News, April 22, 2004 by Kerry Cavanaugh

Just off the fashionable bustle of Ventura Boulevard, walkers and bikers can escape to the quieter, more natural side of Studio City on the bank of the Los Angeles River.

City officials today will dedicate a new half-mile stretch of greenway and bike path on the south side of the river from Whitsett Avenue to Laurel Canyon Boulevard.

What was once dirt, weeds and chain-link is now a paved path with native plants and decorative wrought iron fence. River rock-decorated ramps and a staircase lead to the path and a new public art display with river-inspired poetry is planned.

Part one of the \$10 million Proposition K park bond project to develop a bike path and walkway from Sepulveda Basin to Universal City, the completed greenway is another small step toward the dream of a river park from the West San Fernando Valley to downtown.

"I think we're going to make it happen," said The River Project director Melanie Winter, who went knocking on doors six years ago when the Studio City greenway was first proposed. "As more and more stretches get the greenway treatment, more people are going to say, How do we do the next stretch and how do we keep this going."

There is momentum.

The state is developing two new river parks close to downtown: the 40-acre Taylor Yard and 32-acre Cornfield Park are both former railroad yards.

In the Valley, right across Laurel Canyon from the new city parkway, workers are putting the finishing touches on the new Valleyheart Greenway, a \$750,000 park by The River Project and the County of Los Angeles. Carpenter Elementary School students designed the artwork including the Great Toad Gate, a rattlesnake bench and butterfly and hummingbird garden.

Last year, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy installed a small amphitheater and outdoor classroom along the river at Fulton Avenue, along a stretch of river landscaped by the Village Gardeners. And city engineers and a citizen advisory committee will soon decide whether to head east toward Lankershim or west toward Coldwater Canyon Boulevard for the next \$2 million stretch of the Prop K-funded greenway.

Together, the projects will begin to add a swath of green in a neighborhood becoming increasingly dense with apartments and condominiums.

"I think it really addresses a need for open space," said Tony Lucente, president of the Studio City Residents Association. "People are relieved to finally see it happening. We hope it truly is a beginning."

The first stretch was developed with many compromises. Neighbors worried the new river

path would bring transients and traffic to their quiet community.

There are still kinks in the project. The new greenway is black asphalt, despite some community calls for a light-colored, environmentally friendly surface to make the walk more comfortable in the valley's roasting summers.

The Bureau of Engineering is looking at lighter-toned coating for the asphalt or alternative pathway surfaces and may change the asphalt if they additional money outside of the park bond funds.

Future projects can incorporate those environmentally-friendly materials as the river projects expand through the valley.

This is only the first step, said Councilwoman Wendy Greuel, who represents the area.

"This will be shining example of what is possible along the river front."