

Greenway segment opening

Grade school students designed L.A. River bank park's amenities

Daily News, June 10, 2004 by Kerry Cavanaugh

IF YOU GO: The Valleyheart Greenway will open at 10 a.m. Saturday on Valleyheart Drive, between Laurel Canyon Boulevard and Radford Avenue.

When the Valleyheart Greenway opens Saturday, visitors might note the whimsical design of the snake bench and light-hearted fun in the butterfly maze or perhaps giggle at the giant toad-shaped gate.

From the plants and trees to the fountains, benches and gates, children designed this short stretch of the Los Angeles River bank. Now that the project is complete, even the student designers are surprised with the finished park.

"I can't believe it was designed by fourth- and fifth-graders," said Charlie Ellis, who designed the rattlesnake wall at the park as a fifth-grader at Carpenter Elementary School. He's now in eighth grade at Walter Reed Middle School in North Hollywood.

"I think it looks fantastic. It's really clean and I like the landscaping a lot," added Mitch Muller, Ellis' classmate. "It's a nice feeling that you put your own little two cents into something that's going to last forever."

One piece of a planned Los Angeles River greenway, the tiny Valleyheart stretch runs from Radford Avenue to Laurel Canyon Boulevard. In 2002, The River Project secured a \$60,000 grant from the Coastal Conservancy to educate 70 students from Carpenter Elementary on river history and ecology and then design the landscaping and architectural elements of the park. Los Angeles County handled the construction at \$800,000.

Young artists and the minuscule design budget only enhanced the project.

"Working with the students, they are so open and interested. Their minds are not closed. They go places where our parents' minds fear to tread," said Melanie Winter, director of The River Project.

The greenway reflects what the students learned, and many continue to feel passionate about restoring and protecting the river.

"What I did in fifth grade really showed me we really need to change our ways," Muller said. "What kind of stuck with me was the overall idea that the river was a beautiful place and now it's not and we need to fix it."