

## Trashed-Out Site Transformed Into Place of Natural Beauty

July 1, 2004

Arroyo activists have transformed an eyesore near Granada High into the Granada Native Gardens, a showcase garden that is certain to be enjoyed for generations — with hardly any future maintenance required. The site, approximately one-third acre in size, is located on the banks of the Arroyo Mocho, on Murrieta Boulevard just south of Stanley Boulevard. It used to be a mess — “a trashed-out area,” in the words of Louann Tung of Friends of the Arroyos. The site now boasts an enormous variety of native plants, most just starting to grow, and has 400 feet of paths, a picnic area and educational panels.

A 10-year Livermore resident, Louann Tung has a PhD in nuclear engineering and works part-time at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. She was a full-time employee until her son was born three years ago. Tung’s group has spearheaded the project, aided by a government grant, contributions of materials and equipment by local businesses and many, many hours of volunteer work.

The garden is well enough along that Tung and her helpers are planning a celebration. It will be a potluck, scheduled for Saturday, July 17 from 4 to 7 p.m. at Granada Native Gardens. There will be live music (bluegrass) and informal talks. Alrie Middlebrook, a well known San Jose landscapist, who designed the garden, will be among the speakers. “We just want to raise awareness about what we’re doing. We invite everyone in the community to come out and join us. It should be a fun event,” Tung says.

Though the main mission of Friends of the Arroyos is to restore steelhead trout in the Valley’s arroyos, the group became concerned about the litter problem near Granada High and in 2002 began working with Granada staff to clean it up. Tung heard about a \$12,000 grant that the regional water quality board was making available for a watershed project, and applied, submitting a proposal to develop a native plant park at the trashed-out arroyo site. They received the grant in January 2003, with a December 2003 deadline for completing the project.

Finding someone to design the garden took longer than expected and the deadline was missed. However, the regional board has been understanding. The delay has turned out to be worth it. Tung says, “When we were put in touch with Alrie Middlebrook, it was like the perfect connection. She owns a landscape company in San Jose and has won all kinds of awards and has been written up in *Sunset* magazine a number of times. Alrie came up with this beautiful design for us.”

Granada Native Gardens is named in the plural, Gardens, because it features several sections, each a garden of its own. They include a chaparral area, a meadow, an oak woodland, and a creekside area with cottonwood and sycamore trees. A bike path passes nearby. “It makes for a great destination for people who are riding the bike trails,” Tung observes.

The volunteers have included groups of 15 who came out on six Saturdays last fall, spending four hours each Saturday spreading mulch. “The mulch was the key to getting everything to grow. It was kind of a way of jumpstarting the whole thing,” explains Tung. Members of Boy Scout Troop 919 from the Mormon Church have been among the volunteers. The Scouts and their parents built picnic tables, with tabletops featuring mosaics illustrating the area’s endangered species, steelhead trout, burrowing owl and red-legged frog.

Two gravel companies, Rhodes & Jamieson and RMC Pacific Materials, have been donating gravel, dirt and river cobble. Tung says, “They told me, ‘Just tell us what you need. You can have all you want. And we’ll deliver it.’” Cal Water donated hoses and other equipment to assist the watering. The watering is done by hand, 12 hours a week. Eight people come on Wednesday to do it. The hand-watering is only temporary. Tung and her helpers have been advised it’ll be needed for a couple of years, after which the plants will be able to survive on their own. She says, “Though there’s a lot of work to do now, after about three years the garden will take care of itself. We want to get the message out about that. We’d like to see more people go native, especially at the business parks. It’s just crazy the way the landscaping is done most of the time. Wow, can you imagine not having to mow the lawn every week, or not having to mess with water hoses?”

Not everyone has been helpful; there has been some vandalism and graffiti. “There are some jerks out there,” says Tung. “This has been an amazing project,” she says of the garden. “I’d see these huge obstacles lying ahead, and then all of a sudden they’d fall away. Some work would have to be done; some one would pop up and volunteer to do it. A Scout would call me, saying, ‘I need a project!’ It’s really been amazing.

“The garden seems to have a spirit of its own. This garden just wants to come into existence and nothing can stop it!”