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## **SOUTH L.A. SCHOOL TO CELEBRATE SCHOOLYARD TRANSFORMATION**

**On October 20, TreePeople and Main Street Elementary School invite the neighborhood to celebrate a year-long community collaboration that transformed 4,000 square feet of asphalt into a thriving, sustainable urban forest.**



**Los Angeles, CA, Saturday, October 20**—TreePeople, in partnership with the Los Angeles Unified School District, announces the successful completion of another urban schoolyard transformation. The climate- and site-sensitive landscaping at Main Street Elementary School in South Los Angeles replaces 4,000 square feet of broken blacktop, providing a natural habitat and a safe, clean place for kids to play.

In September 2011, in response to an invitation by LAUSD, TreePeople began a full assessment of Main Street Elementary’s needs and the opportunities to create a greener, healthier, and more sustainable schoolyard. Above all, TreePeople worked with school administrators, teachers, parents, and the surrounding community to establish and train a committed “Green Team” to dream and plan the transformation, participate in the planting, and ensure ongoing maintenance. The urban forest now features a small grove of native sycamores and other trees, along with native drought-tolerant plants, such as monkey flower and hummingbird sage, that attract birds and butterflies. Together they prevent runoff and instead harvest rainwater for more efficient irrigation.

“The garden helps instill in our students a sense of respect and care for nature,” said Principal Elizabeth Bernal. “It is ultimately transforming them into environmentally conscientious leaders who will work toward making our world better and healthier.”

Main Street Elementary—one of 10 LAUSD schools that TreePeople has helped “green” in the last year—serves more than 1,100 K–5 students, nearly 92% of them Hispanic. The yard was planned specifically with a plant palette that works within state curriculum standards, which means that teachers will be trained to use it as an outdoor classroom. And students’ project-based learning experience using the emerging natural environment as their laboratory has been linked to higher test scores. Urban trees and shrubs in Los Angeles alone are estimated to remove 4,500 tons of air pollution per year. In inner-city neighborhoods, there is a correlation between the amount of vegetation and a lower crime rate.

Milestones include the many volunteer work days that became neighborhood events. The transformation was launched on Earth Day this year and culminated in the April 28 planting day. Over the course of the project, more than 450 volunteers—including groups from Disney and Starbucks—turned out with shovels, picks, and spades. In addition to support from The Walt Disney Company, a CAL FIRE grant supported the removal of blacktop and neglected grass. Pasadena-based La Loma Development Company, the project designer, fully utilized the people power of the local community and tremendous support from LAUSD, which covered the cost of soil testing, the soil itself, mulch, and decomposed granite. La Loma also generously donated additional plants, materials for the hardscaping, and equipment rentals.

The school’s Green Team is headed by Sonia Rodriguez, Main Street Elementary’s parent representative and now a TreePeople Citizen Forester. Other team members include teachers, school staff, and parents, as well as retired volunteers like Señor Ramirez, whose children attended the school. An inspiring result of the schoolyard project is that the school Green Team has gone on to form a Community Green Team. They are sharing their current skill base and expanding on it with monthly classes and workshops that TreePeople offers in order to green the local neighborhood.

“The urban forest opening ceremony is a way to celebrate the work that has been done and the promise of everything the garden has yet to bring,” said Principal Bernal. “Parents, teachers, students, and community partners dedicated countless hours to fulfill the vision of creating a serene space where children and adults can appreciate and learn from nature.”

In addition to the official ribbon-cutting, Saturday's celebration will include performances by Aztec dancers, songs by children from the 4th grade, and presentations by the Main Street Elementary School drill team, widely regarded as the best in Los Angeles.

Watch an inspiring slideshow documenting the transformation of Main Street Elementary's schoolyard:

### **Miracle at Main Street School**

( <http://youtu.be/VkJiu5Xg2XI> )

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**Main Street Elementary School** is located at 129 E. 53rd Street, Los Angeles, CA 90011

### **About TreePeople**

TreePeople is an environmental nonprofit that unites the power of trees, people, and nature-based solutions to grow a sustainable future for Los Angeles. For nearly 40 years, TreePeople has worked with communities to plant and care for trees and has provided environmental education for an estimated two million LA area children. The garden at Main Street Elementary is one of the 35 LAUSD projects that TreePeople has spearheaded in the past 5 years. For more information on TreePeople, visit [www.treepeople.org](http://www.treepeople.org).