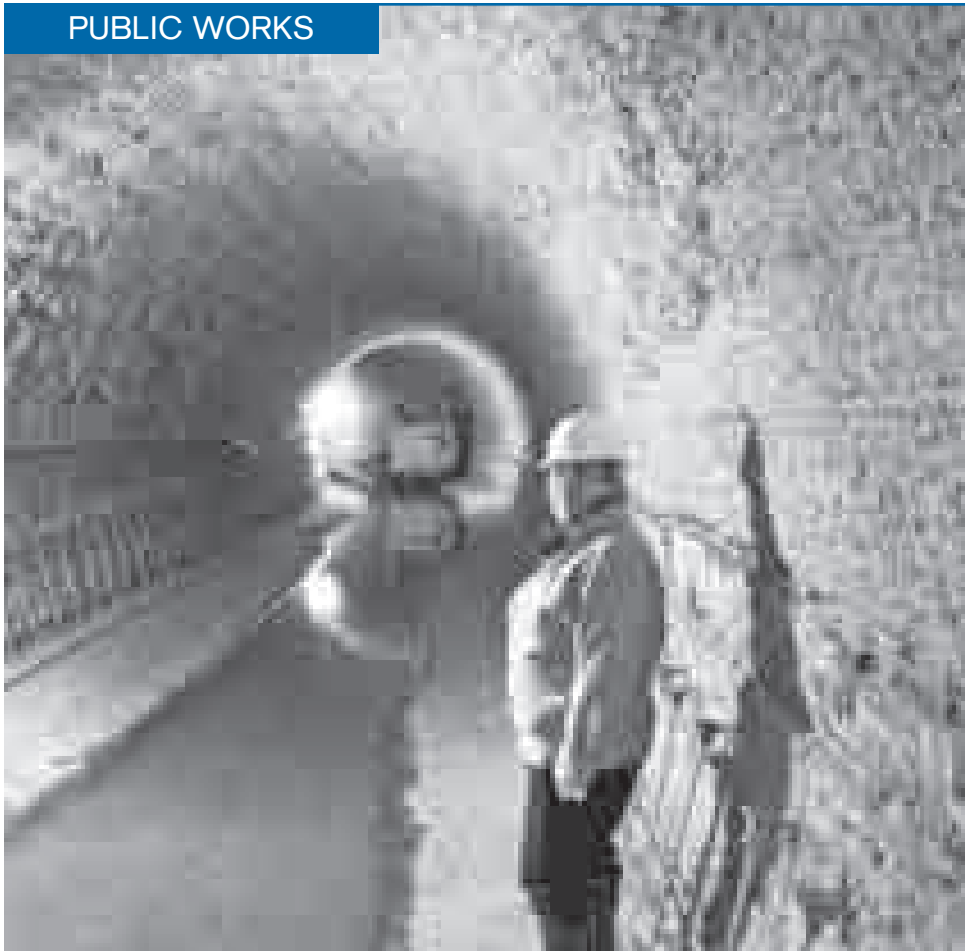


PUBLIC WORKS



Author Anna Sklar in a Los Angeles sewer. Anna Sklar photo by John Rabe/KPCC.

# Pipe Dream

Anna Sklar, former PR chief for Board of Public Works, writes a book about the history of the City's sewers.

By Chris Smith, Wastewater Construction Division Manager, Public Works/Contract Administration

With the exception of those who work on it, few people think of the "rivers of darkness" under our feet. I'm referring to the LA City sewer system. Yes, I know what you're thinking: yuck! Who wants to think about that? Thankfully, someone has thought a lot about it. Anna Sklar, in her new book *Brown Acres, An Intimate History of the Los Angeles Sewer System*, has written a very informative, colorful history of our illustrious sewers.

Anna is a former Director of Public Relations for the Board of Public Works. Her passion for getting behind the scenes is evident in all 232 pages of this book. The fact is, the L.A. City Sewer system, with its 6,700 miles of sewers, 140,000 maintenance holes, 48 pumping plants and four treatment plants, is the largest in the country. With \$3 billion in recent improvements, Los Angeles is now one of the cleanest (in terms of sewer treatment) cities in the country. But, it has not always been.

As Anna describes it, the history of the L.A. sewers is a story of action and reaction. Population growth and pollution have driven the events that led to the sewer system we know today. After an introduction to sewer technologies of the past, Anna gives us the inside story of the people like City Engineer Fred Eaton, who envisioned an integrated sewer system, and the many politicians, citizens, Boards, Commissions and environmental groups who influenced those plans along the way.

The action-reaction cycle goes something like this: Population grows and the sewer system or - lack thereof - produces odors and spills. The public complains and the politicians and engineers come up with a solution. The solution is built -- usually under duress -- and works until population growth overcomes it again.

The City built three "sewers to the sea" between 1887 and 1923. These sewers, which terminated in El Segundo/Playa del Rey, where the Hyperion Plant is now, dumped partially treated sewage into the ocean, contaminating the beaches from the 1880s to 1980s.

The polluted beaches got reactions from the California Board of Health, the Environmental Protection Agency and environmental protection groups led by Santa Monica-based Heal the Bay.



As a result, the City constructed several wastewater treatment plants between 1950 and 1990 that now produce water clean enough to return to the ocean or for irrigation. Incidentally, the title *Brown Acres* is a word play on the "Green Acres" farm owned by the City in Kern County. Treated solids are trucked to this farm and used for fertilizer. Oddly enough, that's what a lot of folks wanted to do with it in the 1880s.

So where are we in the cycle now? The City has completed several large sewers that take flow from the original "sewer to the sea," built in 1923. After 80 years of service, this sewer, called the North Outfall Sewer, is experiencing a rebirth. Anna has captured in words and pictures the stories of the people who dedicated their lives to thinking about something most of us would rather not. This book is a must-read for anyone with an interest in how the City built and evolved a sewer infrastructure so critical to our modern life.

*Brown Acres: An Intimate History of the Los Angeles Sewers*  
 Anna Sklar  
 Angel City Press  
 232 pages  
 Available at amazon.com and other retailers

# This Month at the Club Store

Here are the highlights of the Club Store and Service Center for July:

## TICKETS

For your summer fun – check out these Club ticket deals!

- Disneyland
- LEGOLAND
- Seaworld
- Universal Studios



## MERCHANDISE SPECIALS



**Club T-shirts** are the best way to keep "cool" this summer.

## United Agencies APPOINTMENT SCHEDULE

GET A FREE QUOTE ON AUTO AND HOMEOWNERS INSURANCE

**July 3**  
 Norma Angulo, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

**July 10**  
 Rosa Calderon, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

**July 11**  
 Patty Pulido, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.  
 Norma Angulo, 12 p.m. – 4 p.m.

**July 17**  
 Patty Pulido, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

**July 18**  
 Norma Angulo, 8 a.m. – 12 p.m.  
 Rosa Calderon, 12 p.m. – 4 p.m.

**July 24**  
 Norma Angulo, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

**July 25**  
 Rosa Calderon, 8 a.m. – 12 p.m.  
 Patty Pulido, 12 p.m. – 4 p.m.

**July 31**  
 Rosa Calderon, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

**Club Store and Service Center**  
 120 West Second Street  
 Los Angeles, CA 900  
 (888) 777-1744

Note: The Club Store and Service Center will be closed July 4 for Independence Day.

