



Angel Gomez,
Director of
Member
Services

El Dorado

Hello again! This month we visit El Dorado Nature Center in Long Beach, right off the 605 Freeway. The cost is free; you just have to pay \$5 for parking. I've been visiting this nature center since my two boys were about four years old. It is very well kept, and the trails are very different from one to another. You will see two lakes and lots of trees and small wildlife.

Examples of small wildlife include turtles in the lakes, rabbits under bushes, squirrels in the trees, and if you like bird watching, there are plenty of fine-feathered friends all along the nature center trails. The center also has a small learning center and a shop next to the lake. Your kids and you will enjoy.

Nestled between the San Gabriel River and the 605 Freeway, El Dorado Nature Center is an oasis of a natural habitat, offering visitors the chance to escape the hustle and bustle of the urban environment.

The nearly 100 acres that make up the Nature Center grounds provide sanctuary for animals and plant life. Two miles of dirt trails and a quarter-mile paved trail wind around two lakes, a stream and forested areas.

Once you're inside, cross over the wooden bridge that spans the lake and you'll find yourself on a small island that houses the Visitor Center, containing educational displays and a small gift shop offering environmentally themed books and gifts.

The welcome sign
with operation
hours.



The History

Since the arrival of Europeans, ownership of the land has passed through many hands. It was first part of a Spanish land grant given to Don Manuel Nieto in 1774. When sold to Gov. Figueroa in 1784, it was divided

into five ranchos. The land that now encompasses the Nature Center was part of the larger Rancho Los Alamitos, which along with Rancho Los Cerritos made up much of the city of Long Beach. The Bixby family became owners in 1881 and held the land until 1968, when it was sold to the City of Long Beach. Citizens passed several bond issues during the 1950s and 1960s to pay for the purchase and development of the land that now makes up El Dorado Regional Park. The master plan that guided the Regional Park's design called for the development of a Nature Center, and the laying out of trails and planting began in 1965. Previously flat farmland, the land was contoured to create the lake and stream system. Soil to create the varied topography that exists today came from dredging of the lakes and from soil removed during the construction of the nearby San Gabriel (605) Freeway.

The initial planting was done with an eye for creating wildlife habitat, and the shrubs and trees were chosen for their ability to provide food and shelter for animals.

The center is now home to a wide variety of grasses, shrubs and trees -- most well suited to the Mediterranean climate. Since the mid 1980s, only California native plants have been planted, and the Nature Center's Master Plan (2003) calls for the gradual replacement of most non-native species with native species.

During the planting and development of the Nature Center grounds in the 1960s, the museum and visitor center building was also constructed. Completed in January 1969 and located on an island in the North Lake, the building contains an information desk and small bookstore, a museum and gallery space, staff offices and a classroom. In 1988 the quarter-mile trail was reconfigured to enhance access for visitors with disabilities.

In 1998, the Nature Center grounds also underwent an expansion with the addition of 11 acres of land from the City's old tree farm.

The project was funded through a CalTrans mitigation project and a Los Angeles County Rivers and Trails grant. Known as the Restoration Area, it was planted with native plants from five regional plant communities -- oak woodland, riparian, chaparral, coastal sage scrub and grassland. Another seven acres to the south of Willow Street was designated as Nature Center land in 1999 and plans for riparian restoration along the stream are under way.



Angel Jr. and Aden in front of the El Dorado Nature Center.



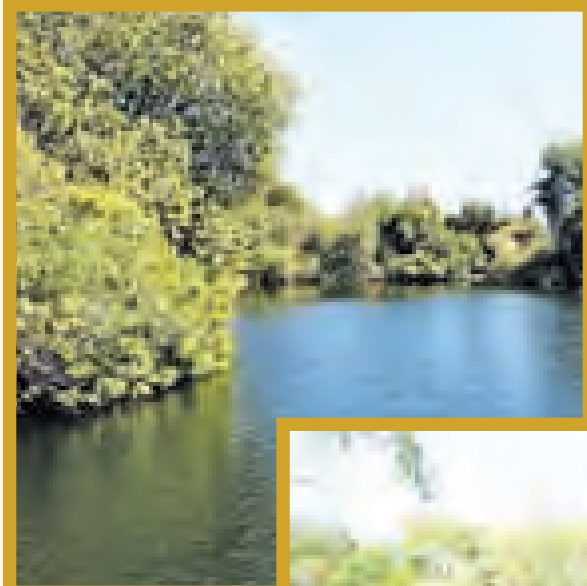
Aden, Angel Jr. and I in the middle of a path.

Long Beach

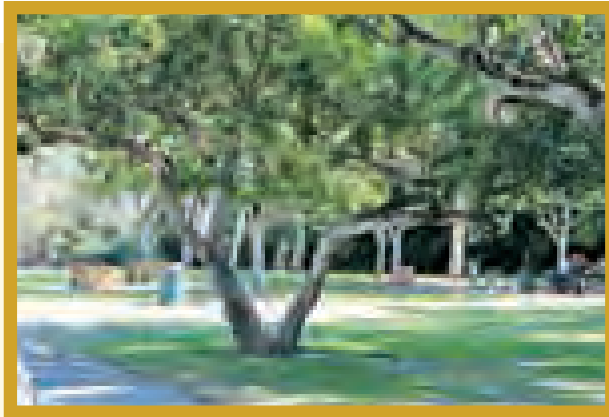
Nature Center

El Dorado Nature Center

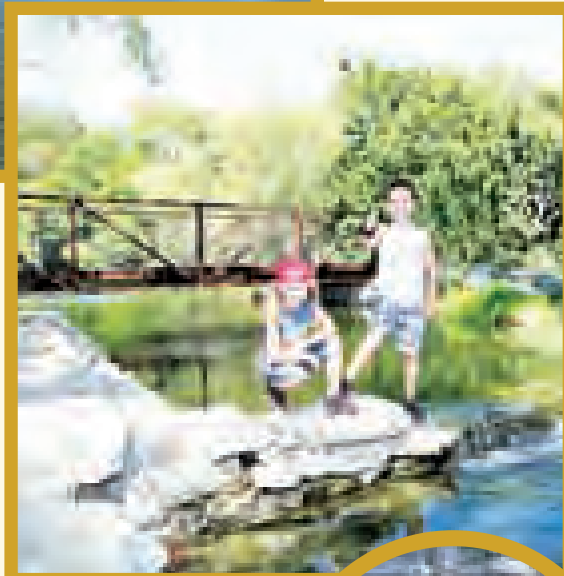
7550 E Spring St. Long Beach, CA 90815

PHONE: (562) 570-1785**ADMISSION:** Free.**HIKES:** There is a one- and two-mile trail system.**HIKE TIME:** 2 hours**DIFFICULTY:** Very easy, with lots of shade and mostly level walking.**NATURE CENTER HOURS:****TRAILS:** Tuesdays-Sundays, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.**MUSEUM:** Tuesdays - Fridays, 10 a.m. 4 p.m.; Saturdays-Sundays, 8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m. Closed Mondays.**VEHICLE ENTRY FEES:** \$5 Monday – Friday, \$7 weekends, \$8 holidays. Pedestrians and bicyclists do not pay vehicle entrance fee.

A nice view of the lake and surrounding trees.



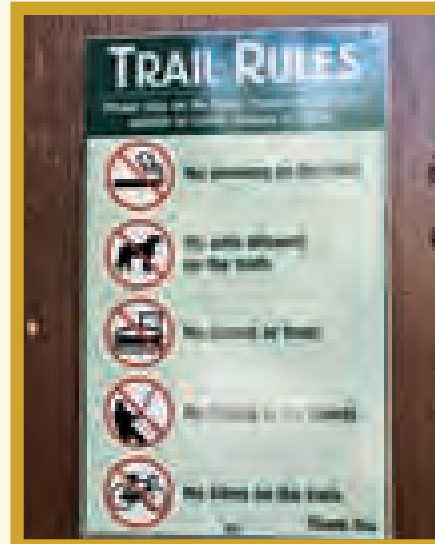
A picnic area for lunch time snack.



Aden and Angel Jr. in front of the bridge and next to one of the creeks.



Aden and Angel Jr. having fun in the Nature Center.



The trail rules.

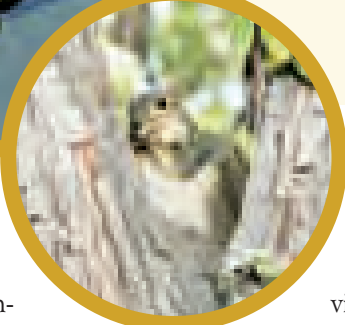
Lots of turtles sunbathing.



Ducks and birds play in the creek.



A friendly squirrel.



Angel, Aden and Angel Jr. in front of the El Dorado sign.



Aden and Angel Jr. decide if they should go to the one or two mile trail.

Future plans include possibly obtaining additional land south of Willow Street from Southern California Edison to expand the riparian area along the river to the confluence of Coyote Creek and the San Gabriel River.

The Hike

El Dorado Nature Center is right next to the 605 Freeway, but let me tell you, once you are in the center, it is more like an adventure into nature.

You enter into a world of tranquility and solitude. Everywhere you look you will see beautiful trees, creeks, birds, rabbits and squirrels.

Most of the path is level except for one spot where you zigzag, going up

about four feet. The views are amazing and the sounds of nature will surround your every step.

People visit the center for lots of reasons – wedding photos and bird watchers, are popular, but the majority comes for the exercise and serenity along the way.

When you arrive, you will see a bridge that takes you to the Nature Center. Please go inside and spend some time viewing all the exhibits and wonderful fossils available in the center; you can also purchase a few items related to the centers activities. I like all the fossils myself.

Moving on, once you pass the Nature Center you will find another

bridge and another lake. Take a left and you will see a poster-sized picture of the trail. Then, if you keep going forward, you will begin your adventure in the path and all its beautiful surroundings.

After a few minutes of walking, you will see a sign for the one mile or two-mile path, so it's up to you. They are both just as pleasant, so you will need to come back a second time or go on both to see everything the nature center has to offer.

As I mentioned in the intro, if you have small children, this is a great place to have them learn, explore and use lots of their energy.

If you want a quiet time to reflect and enjoy nature, this is also the place

for you. If you like flowers, this is also a great place to educate yourself and see just how many different plants you can find. I have seen photo classes, bird-watching classes and plant-identifying classes come by from time to time. The Nature Center has lots and lots to do and see, all for free. You just pay for parking.

Don't forget to bring your camera and take plenty of photos and send them to me at agomez@cityemployeesclub.com. Bring water, snacks and maybe spend a little time having a picnic.

**As always,
be safe and *Be Alive!*
— Angel**