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 Lake Merritt Institute  
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To contribute to the Lake  
 Merritt Institute, contact  
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 Visit us at:  
[www.lakemerrittinstitute.org](http://www.lakemerrittinstitute.org)

**A Fisherman's Big Catch**



Ross Laverty with his big fish

Ross Laverty e-mailed us a photo of the largest Striped Bass he's ever caught. His catch occurred on March 4, 2008, from Lake Merritt. It weighed 39 pounds and was 44 inches long.

Laverty has been fishing and studying the Lake's fish since 2003. He has caught and released dozens of Striped Bass in a wide variety of sizes from 5 pounds to 39.

"Did you know a 36.5 pound Striper I caught in 2006 was 11 years old, as determined by scale-samples?" he asks. "She must have eaten a lot of Lake Merritt smelt over the years in order to attain that weight. And imagine how far they must swim as fingerlings from the Sacramento Delta breeding area in order to find themselves happily trapped in 'Smelt Paradise' (Lake Merritt) once they mature. It's nothing less than a miracle!"



The Lake Merritt Institute  
 568 Bellevue Avenue  
 Oakland, CA 94610

**Volunteer Name**  
**Street Address**  
**City, ST ZIP Code**

**THE LAKE MERRITT**  
**INSTITUTE** AN URBAN RUNOFF AND  
 WATERSHED RESEARCH CENTER

**TIDINGS**  
 MAY/JUNE 2008



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**Plastic Bags: They're More Harmful than You Think**

By Kaletha Patterson

Plastic or paper? How about neither?  
 How many times have you been asked this question at the local supermarket only to find yourself mentally stumped to determine the most environmentally friendly response before checking out of the grocery line?

Don't we all hesitate in the midst of buying broccoli and bananas to analyze the benefits of carrying the sturdy brown bag over the shiny lightweight one?

In this day and age with an increase in the price of consumer goods, this question may be the furthest thought from your mind. However your selection could ultimately have a direct impact on a more costly commodity - our environment.

Many reports have shown it's more beneficial to carry reusable bags made of canvas and other sturdy materials as opposed to thin, non-biodegradable bags like plastic. In certain states and throughout the world in countries such as Ireland, laws are being created banning the use of plastic and paper bags altogether. In the United States, many consumers understand the benefits of reusable bags and have taken it upon themselves to purchase and use this alternative. Some supermarkets have created incentive programs for reusable bags designed to encourage their consumers to think green and become a part of their sustainable efforts in the community.

As it stands, single-use plastic bags already cause considerable harm to the environment. The bags

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**Kudos to LMI**

**City Council**  
 CITY OF OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

*Commendation*

*We join community leaders and officials in honoring the Lake Merritt volunteers for their committed work at Oakland's Beautiful Lake Merritt and their continued dedication to this city as a whole. You are truly the guardians of this, our crown jewel.*

*Lake Merritt Volunteers are the keepers of our lake. People come from around the world to visit Lake Merritt. Their experience is made all the more wonderful because twice a week, over the years, volunteers have helped build a truly community-based effort maintaining the Lake and enabling all who visit to enjoy its beauty. Maintaining cleanliness of the lake waters not only benefits the public aesthetically but benefits the non-human residents of the lake as well, our bird sanctuary residents, fish and flora. Under the leadership and guidance of Dr. Richard Bailey, you the volunteers are greatly appreciated and serve as strong models of exemplary behavior in the community.*

*May you continue your efforts of volunteerism. With sincere thanks.*

*Nancy J. Nadel*  
 Nancy J. Nadel  
 Councilmember, District

*Commendation Letter*  
 This was presented to the Institute on April 2 at the Keep Oakland Beautiful Volunteer Appreciation Evening.

## A Little Piece of Italy in Oakland

By Kaletha Patterson

There is a common thread to be found between the flowing narrow canals of Venice, Italy, and the temperate wide waterway of Lake Merritt. This thread is so tiny, yet so culturally impactful, only persons with curious or adventurous spirits may take note – both bodies of water are fluid platforms hosting one-of-a-kind gondola rides on watercraft created by the artisans of Venice.

The European city may have earned a reputation for its colorful carnivals and picturesque photos that depict couples serenaded by a gondolier rowing under bridges, near shops, and throughout this historic enclave, yet on this side of the world, the heart of Oakland has come to embody a similar vision through the efforts of two local proprietors.

Angelino Sandri and April Quinn operate Gondola Servizio, a business that provides authentic gondola rides on Lake Merritt. For the past nine years, they have provided romantic rides for couples, blissful rides to locals and tourists, and an all-around unique experience for anyone interested in booking an excursion.

Sandri arrived in the United States via his Venetian birthplace and Canadian schooling. However in speaking with this entrepreneur it's evident he has absorbed a wealth of knowledge in Venetian history from his adult living experiences in his homeland.

He and his wife own and operate three boats, two gondolas and one sandolo, each of which was built in Venice by Sandri's friend Roberto Dei Rossi. According to Sandri, the sandolo predates the gondola as the oldest boat within the Venice lagoon. He said that prior to becoming a part of Italy, Venice was an independent territory for 1,100 years. As an entity unto itself, the country's elite showcased their wealth by using gondolas as limousines. "Two gondoliers rowed the rich people," he explained.



*A traditional Venetian gondola*

Sandri further explained that after Venice was conquered, the rich residents fled and the gondoliers were left behind to seek business from the ordinary public. Gondoliers were forced to use their gondolas for passenger transport, fishing and racing. "Small boats took people out for coins like taxi operators," he added.

Today, gondolas are operated in Venice to keep a piece of history alive, the same reason the cable cars are kept active in San Francisco.

Gondola rides on Lake Merritt are ideal because of the conditions within these waters. "Lake Merritt has a good boating operation. The water is calmer than the Bay and similar to Venice's water. The water is brackish in the winter and saltier in the summer," Sandri highlighted.

He also finds the urban environment is apropos to running the gondola as opposed to a remote country lake. Most rides are conducted between 5:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. when the romantic setting is further emphasized by the lights illuminated around the Lake. "It makes the ride more mysterious and beautiful," Sandri exclaims. All of his gondoliers sing a cappella songs during the row, and it's not uncommon for people to bring their own bottles of wine and picnic baskets.

When asked about the craftsmanship of his gondolas, Sandri effortlessly described their components. "The boats are made of eight different types of wood. It's an asymmetrical boat that is built crooked on purpose to make it easy to row. A lot of people don't know that gondolas are rowboats but it's one of most technical rowing boats in the world."

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*Plastic Bags continued...*

are so lightweight that even with proper disposal, wind and storm water flows can sweep them into waterways such as Lake Merritt and the San Francisco Bay. The plastic bag debris blocks drains and can lead to flooding during heavy rains. The bags also cause harm and death to wildlife that mistakenly ingest the bags instead of food. From an economical standpoint, plastic bags are also costing cities and residents more money due to the high cost of litter removal.

According to AB 2449, the 2006 legislation creating an At-Store Recycling Program, Californians throw away 600 disposable plastic bags per second, with a total of 19 billion plastic bags disposed of every year.

Globally, 500 billion to 1 trillion single-use disposable plastic bags are used each year, which is over one million per minute, the production of which requires over 12 million barrels of oil and results in the deaths of thousands of marine animals through ingestion and entanglement.<sup>1</sup>

Another vital fact regarding the hazardous effects of using plastic bags is that they're made of oil. The City of Oakland has proposed an Ordinance banning the use of non-biodegradable plastic carry-out bags by retail establishments that gross one million dollars or more annually and providing education and incentives for shoppers to use re-useable bags. The language in the proposed Ordinance notes that almost 10 percent of U.S. oil consumption is used to make plastic, including single-use plastic bags.

Locally, discouraging the use of single-use plastic bags will help facilitate a clean, sustainable environment in which our waterways and streets are free from litter and pollution and marine life will no longer be exposed to elements that are detrimental to their habitats.

<sup>1</sup> California Assembly Bill No. 2449 (Levine), Section 1



*Plastic bags littering the environment*

*A Little Piece of Italy continued...*

In identifying their unique ties to other parts of the globe, Sandri offered his insight. "The style is very Eastern. Venice did trading in the Middle East which is why a lot of the architecture and boats reflect an Eastern [style] rather than European."

Another intriguing fact is that the boats are always painted black as this color preserves the wood for longer periods of time and in humid atmospheres such as those found in Venice. Although Lake Merritt does not radiate the same temperatures as this medieval city, Sandri believes in staying as authentic to the trade as he can.

As summer approaches, Gondola Servizio is bound to be busier than normal. Although the business is open year-round by appointment only, the owners find bookings are the greatest between May and October with the busiest day falling on Valentine's Day in February.

In 2009, Sandri said they will be running services from a hundred-year-old boathouse that will cater to people walking in without appointments.

The hour-long gondola ride costs \$75 for two people, and bookings can be made for groups or small parties. "It's a great gift. A lot of people buy gift certificates."