

## Youths help spruce up future river museum



The old livery stable at Steamer Landing Park (on McNear Peninsula) is being transformed by the Sonoma County Youth Ecology Corps into a museum detailing the history of the Petaluma River.

*Robert Vente*

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By Sean Trott  
Argus-Courier Intern

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Most people who visit Petaluma know about the Petaluma River, which is really more of a brackish slough — but still deeply rooted in Petaluma's history.

A new project by the Sonoma County Youth Ecology Corps is an attempt to preserve the historic value and memories of the river.

The group of young workers is transforming the old livery stable at Steamer Landing Park (on McNear Peninsula) into a museum detailing the history of the Petaluma River.

“The purpose of this project is to create the River Heritage Center, which will tell about the history of the Petaluma River,” said Eve O’Rourke, an organizer of the effort. “This includes a wide array of topics such as commerce, the Butter & Egg Days Parade and the varied ecology of the river. We’re also going to be teaching about the birds and animals inhabiting the river. We want people to be aware of this wonderful resource.”

According to O’Rourke, the livery stable is just a “drafty old barn with no electricity or even locked doors, so nothing valuable can be kept there yet.” However, the organization is continually cleaning it and making sure it is safe.

O’Rourke also stresses that there will not be any remodeling of the stable because it is a historic structure itself. The only changes will be alterations that are necessary to keep it intact, such as new windows.

As far as progress goes, the project appears to be an ongoing one, a museum that will be updated continuously as time goes on. Since the first planning meeting on May 26, headway has been made, O’Rourke said.

“So far, the barn has been cleaned extensively. We’re also preparing for the River Festival, so we built a stage, floor, and conversation pit in and around the barn,” she said. “We even built steps down to the river for direct river access, and we’re using granite to pave the area in front of the barn door.”

Other improvements are planned for the area as well, including a more accessible pathway around the barn itself.

Eventually, river artifacts will regularly be added to the museum. Right now, the museum is fairly bare except for some picture boards depicting a variety of scenes — from illustrations of the influences of the river on Petaluma’s history to descriptions of the river’s ecology.

The youth corps, part of a summer youth employment program called California Youth@Work, will be steadily working for another four weeks or so, O’Rourke said.

“Even after this crew leaves, we’ll be ongoing with projects down there,” she said. “We’re building something wonderful, and it’s only going to keep developing further.”