

July-August 2012 E-Newsletter

Darren Gee: Students on the Steps

Sometimes things just fall into place. Darren Gee, a George Washington High School (GWHS) student who graduated in June 2012, was walking up the Hidden Garden Steps one Saturday and was amazed at what he saw: "There were people cleaning up, weeding, and planting," he recalled.

Darren, who lives one block away, knew how the stairway had looked before the work began. "It was scary," he said. "The wet leaves made it slippery. There was graffiti. There were liquor bottles." Darren decided right then that he wanted to help. And help he did! Darren was the events coordinator for the GWHS Key Club, a Kiwanis-sponsored international service organization. Starting in January, he not only showed up at the Saturday clean-up himself, but brought along 20 other Key Club members.

He could have chosen from dozens of organizations that might need the club's services. But the Steps project was right on target for him and the group of high-school students: "Many volunteer jobs are what's called 'indirect service.' You pass out water at a marathon, say, and maybe the organization will contribute funds. This job is 'direct service.' You can see what you're



Arlene Silverman interviewing Darren Gee.

accomplishing first hand. You plant something and you watch it grow..."

For many of the Key Club members, this was the first time they had done anything quite like the work that the gardening crew does. They painted over graffiti, they learned to identify various plants, they cleaned up the

steps, and they were introduced to the Green Hairstreak Butterfly corridor. "Many of [the club members] had never gotten their hands dirty!" But, says Darren, "[HGS] people were so nice. They explained everything before we started."

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Calendar:

- **August 4, 10-11:30 a.m.**
Monthly Organizing Committee meeting; follow live on Twitter @gardensteps
- **August 4, 11 a.m.**
"Walking in San Francisco" Tour
- **August 11, 1-3 p.m.**
Garden Clean-up on the Steps
- **August 12, 9 a.m.—1 p.m.**
Hidden Garden Steps at Inner Sunset Farmers' Market (located at the parking lot near 9th Avenue)

Check Out Our Indiegogo Online Campaign!

Who says the permit process can't be fun? A playfully targeted online fundraising campaign to raise \$8,000 for project permits is continuing through September 9, 2012. Hidden Garden Steps volunteer Sherry Boschert filmed and posted the video that is now available on the Indiegogo site.

Check out the video and encourage friends and family to spread the word, and in the process, get a laugh or two. Donations of any amount are greatly appreciated. To contribute to the campaign, please visit our Indiegogo fundraising page at <http://igg.me/p/72580>.

The Steps Getting Traction on Walking Tour

The Hidden Garden Steps project is slated to be included once again in “Walking in San Francisco for Health and History.” The walk’s winding trek extends from West Portal through the Forest Hill area and into Golden Gate Park. An earlier walk, held in May 2012, attracted over 50 participants and helped increase awareness about our project.



Interested in joining? The next walk will begin at the Starbucks located at 100 West Portal Avenue on Saturday, August 4, 2012 at 11 a.m. The walk will continue through the Forest Hill neighborhood, passing over a variety of stairways, including the Pacheco Grand Staircase. The walk will also feature a visit to the ceramic-tiled steps on Moraga Street, between 15th and 16th avenues, the Hidden Garden Steps site, and then conclude in Golden Gate Park.



For more information and to make reservations, please visit the group’s website at <http://tinyurl.com/crze55g>.

What’s Blooming in Our Garden—August

Come see the garden in full bloom on the Hidden Garden Steps. Although summer in the avenues can be cold and breezy, the view from the Steps is magnificent on any day. The garden is also attracting enthusiastic attention from neighbors and those using the stairs for exercise and quick access to transportation. Here’s what the buzz is about:

1. **Coastal buckwheat**—grey-green native plants with soft pom-pom like blooms—are the preferred plants in which the female Green Hairstreak Butterfly lays her eggs. A committee member recently spotted one of these butterflies—rare in our area. (*See image to the right.*) The plants, generously donated by Nature in the City, are a critical part of the effort to save this endangered species.
2. **Brilliantly orange monkey flowers**, also donated by Nature in the City, have added a rich swatch of color not seen on the site in years.
3. **California poppies** have returned full force in the areas we are cultivating.
4. **Crocasmias**, planted on one of the terraced areas near the bottom of the Steps, are beginning to flower.



Stay tuned and keep stopping by. We’ve begun planting a variety of colorful and varied succulents at the foot of the hill. When the rains return in late fall, we will do more concentrated planting with natives and other drought-tolerant plants that will add beauty to the garden and help the Green Hairstreak Butterfly to thrive.

To help maintain and further develop the site, please join us on the second Saturday of the month, from 1-3 p.m., as we plant, weed, sweep the Steps, and continue keeping the site free of graffiti. Plant donations—particularly California native plants—are welcomed, encouraged, and deeply appreciated. For more information about specific plants needed, please visit our website at <http://tinyurl.com/7sza7aq>.

Darren Gee: Students on the Steps *(continued from page 1)*

The Steps clean-up crew were obviously pleased as well. “[The students] do everything. We are so grateful to have such altruistic, enthusiastic young people helping us,” says Hidden Garden Steps Organizing Committee Co-Chair Liz McLoughlin, who is part of the monthly HGS clean-up crew.

Apart from his commitment to helping our garden grow and other high school activities, Darren is looking to the future.

He plans to major in pre-med and has been accepted by UC-Irvine for the fall. In the meantime, he said he would “definitely recommend this project” to other students—particularly “those who want a real hands-on experience!”

For those interested in volunteering with the Steps clean-up crew from 1 – 3 p.m. on the second Saturday of any month, please contact Hidden Garden Steps Organizing Committee Co-Chair Paul Signorelli (paul@paulsignorelli.com).



Thank you
for helping to transform
our community
one step at a time.

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