

## Press Release

**For Immediate Release: January 18, 2012**

**Images available upon request or at [losaltoshistory.org](http://losaltoshistory.org)**

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### ***Los Altos History Museum Presents New Programs to Accompany Shaped By Water – Past, Present & Future On Exhibit through April 22, 2012***

**LOS ALTOS, CA — January 13, 2012:** As we wait for long-overdue winter rains to replenish our parched snowpack and aquifers, the role of water in shaping the history of Santa Clara Valley – and how its usage will shape our future moving forward – is even more in mind. All this is showcased in the Los Altos History Museum’s popular new exhibition, *Shaped by Water – Past, Present & Future*, on exhibit through Earth Day, April 22, 2012.

“The Sierra snowpack is our state’s largest reservoir,” says volunteer exhibit chair Linda Gass, “and the fact that we can’t get out there to ski and snowboard doesn’t bode well for our water supply.” Visitors attending the exhibit are amazed to learn where their water actually comes from before it gets to their sink... and how important far-away water resources are to their daily lives.



While the valley’s population had mushroomed in the past 10,000 years, the amount of water we have is still the same, and we cannot manufacture more. Using photographs, art, stories, and interactive activities, visitors are gaining a greater appreciation of the role water plays – and learning new ideas to protect and preserve this essential resource. A recent group of Brownies (Oak School Troop 60477 - pictured) said their favorite part is “where we could discover which foods require the most water to produce. Who would have thought that steak beats grapes! We really could not get enough of that one.” RFID tags on the bottom of the plastic fruit, meat and other foods in the house-made exhibit are converted to a series of carnival-like lights which indicate how many hundreds to thousands of gallons go into making a pound of that food or drink. (Wine and beer lovers should feel very good about their low water use.) It is prompting people to think about what they eat. “Basically, the foods that are healthier for you, like brown vs. white rice, take less water to produce,” says Gass. Tofu and chicken take much less water than pork and beef. Added up, the impact of small changes can be enormous.

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Art pieces also communicate message about waste and its affect on the water we rely on.



*“Barreled by Plastic”* by Kathleen Egan (a surf board with a “wave” of plastic jugs. Left, photo by Joel Bartlett) is a great spot to take a photo. One of the Brownies thinks she recognizes a plastic slipper lost at the beach last summer in *“46,000 and counting”* by Judith Selby-Lang and Richard Lang (thousands of scrap pieces of plastic washed up on just one stretch of Kehoe Beach).

To further augment the exhibition, *Shaped by Water* goes beyond the Museum’s walls with an inspiring slate of programs, events and community engagement. New programs include:



**Water Magic Show - Saturday, February 4, 1 – 2 p.m.**

Come see a magical and musical presentation by the Water Wizard. Entertaining and educational! Los Altos Library, Program Room. Free, ages 5 – adult. [santaclaracountylib.org/losaltos](http://santaclaracountylib.org/losaltos). *In partnership with the Santa Clara Valley Water District and the Los Altos Library.*



**Wastewater Treatment Plant Walking Tour - Saturday, March 3, 10 a.m. – noon**

Comprehensive tour of the inner workings of the Palo Alto Regional Water Quality Control Plant. Free, ages 6th grade – adult, limited attendance, register by March 1 by calling 650-948-9427x14 or email [ASorensen@losaltoshistory.org](mailto:ASorensen@losaltoshistory.org). *In partnership with the City of Palo Alto.*



**Watershed Tour of Adobe Creek - March 24, 9 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.**

Bus tour of the Adobe Creek watershed with several stops in Palo Alto and Los Altos, expert speakers and lunch, moderate walking. \$35, ages 18 and older, register by March 2 at [losaltoshistory.org](http://losaltoshistory.org) or [greenfoothills.org](http://greenfoothills.org). *In partnership with Committee for Green Foothills with support from PG&E.*



**Earth Day Celebration at the Museum - April 21, noon – 4 p.m.**

Pick up educational materials to guide you and your family in conserving and caring for our water resources. Los Altos History Museum Courtyard. Free, fun for the entire family!

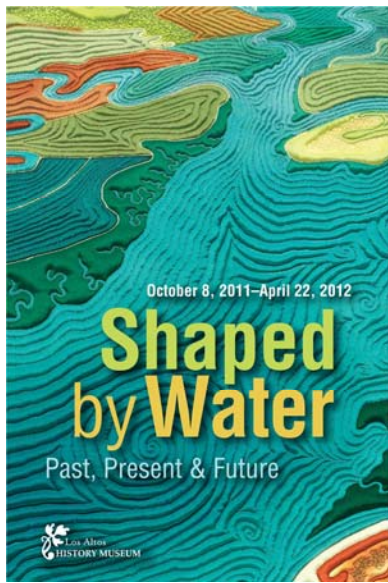
**Community Partners:** This exhibition and associated programming was made possible by the generous financial support from the [Los Altos Community Foundation](#), [California Water Service Company](#), [Morgan Family Foundation](#), [Purissima Hills Water District](#), [San Jose Water Company](#), [Santa Clara Valley Water District](#), [Kiwanis Club of Los Altos](#), [Fugro Consultants](#), [GreenTown Los Altos](#) and ongoing support from the City of Los Altos and the members of the Los Altos History Museum. The Museum would also like to acknowledge community support for this exhibition from its partners including members of [Acterra](#), [Committee for Green Foothills](#), Los Altos Hills Water Conservation Committee and others.

The Los Altos History Museum is located at 51 S. San Antonio Road, Los Altos, California. Museum hours are Thursday through Sunday, noon to 4:00 p.m. Admission is free. For ongoing information and the latest updates to exhibition programming please visit [losaltoshistory.org](http://losaltoshistory.org).

PHOTOS

**Press photos are available for download at the Los Altos History Museum website:**

**[www.losaltoshistory.org/press.html](http://www.losaltoshistory.org/press.html).** Brownie troop image: parents of each Brownie have granted permission to use this photo.



## BACKGROUND

### **About *Shaped by Water – Past, Present & Future***

*Shaped by Water – Past, Present & Future* inspires a deep connection to this precious and essential resource through indoor and outdoor exhibits that incorporate artifacts, stories, photographs, maps and artwork by San Francisco Bay Area–based artists. The story of water in this region is told from a historical perspective beginning with the indigenous tribal people up to modern day through a comprehensive and interactive exhibition experience. It underscores how each period in our local history has been characterized by a changing relationship between humans and water. For example, the tribal people had an intimate relationship to water and moved around in response to the wet and dry seasons. This historical period is showcased in a native landscape and shelter installation that documents how water supported their life needs while they lived near creeks and the bay. A special sound station features three recorded tribal stories about water.

New immigrants to Santa Clara Valley brought dramatic changes in water usage and management beginning with the Spanish missionaries who built small rock dams on creeks as well as irrigation ditches. The Mexicans further transformed the watershed through their ranching practices. Later, immigrants from the eastern United States brought even more significant changes during the Gold Rush with the proliferation of agriculture and digging of wells. The exhibition highlights this period with an interactive model of a groundwater artesian well along with panels describing the environmental impacts of the Spanish expeditions, Mexican ranchos, and the Gold Rush.

As our region entered the era known as the “Valley of Hearts Delight,” windmills and water tanks dotted the landscape and the rapid depletion of groundwater made a more organized water infrastructure necessary. Conserving local surface water in reservoirs was one of the major accomplishments of this time. Among the highlights visitors can view documenting this period are original film footage of the Santa Clara Valley 1937 flood, as well as panels with historic dam building photographs and charts showing the dramatic drops in groundwater levels due to the pumping of water for thirsty farms.

The post-World War II boom brought even larger water infrastructure projects. Massive state and federal water projects and water treatment facilities transformed the availability and use of water. As the population of the Santa Clara Valley grew in the post-World War II boom, the Valley went from being completely self-sufficient using local water to 50-100 percent reliant on imported water. The “business” of water and water companies became necessary to help manage community water needs and conservation efforts.

Current consumption patterns can be explored in exhibits that uncover the amount of water needed to produce our foods to current and future trends in local water consumption. An outdoor display shows visitors in actual gallons how much water they use on a daily basis. Interactive maps tell visitors at a push of a button where their water comes from, as well as locate local reservoirs. Environmental concerns such as pollution of groundwater and surface water, Superfund sites, and water waste treatment processes are also emphasized. A map helps local visitors identify what watershed they live in and the “Creek Stories” bulletin board provides a place for visitors to write down stories of their experiences with our creeks.

Looking into the future, our growing population and changes in rainfall patterns have the potential to severely impact our water supply. The exhibition outlines future challenges and outcomes with concrete ideas to reduce consumption, reuse, and recycle water. Visitors are able to view demonstration installations of a laundry-to-landscape gray-water wetland, rain-water harvesting systems, and a residential green roof. A fun, interactive speaking-fish display teaches young and old visitors alike about the important role of fish ladders. Resources and ideas for action are provided to visitors to continue and extend their thoughtful use of water.

Adding another layer of interpretation, the Museum exhibition includes water-related artwork by San Francisco Bay Area–based artists that further expand the story of our connection with water including “*Wetland Washing Machine*” by Mark Brest van Kempen (washing clothes with water cleaned by plants), “*Barreled by Plastic*” by Kathleen Egan (a surf board with a “wave” of plastic jugs); and “*46,000 and counting*” by Judith Selby-Lang and

Richard Lang (thousands of scrap pieces of plastic washed up on just one stretch of Kehoe Beach). Off-site water-related art happenings are also scheduled: *“Watershed Sculpture at Adobe Creek: An Inquiry into Ecological Restoration”* with artist Daniel McCormick at Redwood Grove in Los Altos is scheduled January 14-16 will engage the community in building a bio-engineered willow sculpture to restore a creek bank along Adobe Creek.

“Our critical connection with water and its historical impact on this region to date made it a perfect fit for the Museum’s programming,” said volunteer Linda Gass, *Shaped by Water* Exhibit Chair and a Los Altos, California-based artist whose art addresses water issues in California and the American West. “Our main goal for *Shaped by Water* is to educate the community about the past, present, and future of water while inspiring appreciation and action for this precious resource. Development of this exhibition was a huge undertaking and our team of museum and community volunteers have put thousands of hours into researching and building what you see.” The exhibition has ignited enthusiasm from hundreds of guests, and other venues are interested in displaying it in the future, adding the story of water in their specific location.

### **About the Los Altos History Museum**

The Los Altos History Museum is dedicated to collecting, preserving, and interpreting the history of the Los Altos area. Permanent exhibits include:

- **“Crown of the Peninsula: Los Altos Land Use Over Time”** – Features interactive displays on the Ohlone, rancho days, people-of-note, orchard days, Silicon Valley beginnings and our railroad history (free audio tour).
- **J. Gilbert Smith History House** – A 1905 shingled Craftsman-style house featuring period furnishings, toys and decorative arts, interpreted in the era of the Great Depression.
- **Outdoor Agricultural Exhibits** – Features a 1915 tank house, antique farm equipment, walnut hullers and tools for cutting, sulfuring and drying apricots.

The Museum is a partnership between the Association of the Los Altos History Museum, a private non-profit (501)(c)(3) organization and the City of Los Altos. The Los Altos History Museum and J. Gilbert Smith House are open Thursday through Sunday, from noon-4:00 p.m. and are located behind the main library at 51 So. San Antonio Road, Los Altos, CA 94022. Admission is free. For further information visit [losaltoshistory.org](http://losaltoshistory.org) or call 650-948-9427.

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