

## OUR NEIGHBORS: CHRIS TREADWAY

School could reap greenway's rewards

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Anyway you look at it, the Richmond Greenway has potential. What that potential turns out to be depends on how the immediate and farther-flung community members buy in to the concept of the greenway as a local asset.

The first phase of the greenway -- a former railroad right-of-way turned to public use -- opened in May and extends from Second Street at the Richmond Parkway to 23rd Street, passing within a block of Samuel L. Gompers High School on Ninth Street.

Opportunity West, a Richmond-based nonprofit organization, sees the potential -- or opportunity, if you will -- for a mutually beneficial relationship between the greenway and the continuation high school.

The organization received a \$10,000 "catalyst grant" earlier this month for a program it calls the Gompers Greenway Brigade.

The greenway is a likely path to school for many Gompers students and can be a resource during the school day, said Cheryl Maier, executive director of Opportunity West. That, in turn, could help promote local ownership and participation in making the greenway a community resource.

"The idea was that since the kids are going to be using the space anyway, let's get them involved in creating it," she said. "Hopefully they'll see it's something that has to be nurtured, has to be cared for."

Opportunity West is managing the program with funding from the Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council, which annually gives grants to "organizations that offer creative and culturally relevant approaches to making the outdoors more accessible to underserved youth."

About a dozen volunteers, including members of Friends of the Richmond Greenway, have been meeting monthly and are consulting with Gompers faculty and Principal Pamala Blake to determine activities along the trail that can be incorporated into the curriculum.

Maier noted one obvious need right off the top. "The school has no sports field of any kind," she said. "They could well use this for physical education."

Other ideas have been raised as well.

"We'll talk with the physical science instructors and how they might see it as a laboratory," Maier said. "Would a community garden play into the science curriculum?"

Arts activities such as a mural are also a possibility, as are instructing participants about the greenway's history and its significance to the community.

The potential is all there, and "we're not worried that we won't be able to put together an exciting program for the kids," Maier said.

Two other organizations with ties to West County were recipients of Stewardship Council grants.

Project Avary, a San Rafael-based group that provides "support for children whose parents are imprisoned or otherwise involved with the criminal justice system," was awarded \$10,000 for its Environmental Educational and Leadership Project. Project Avary works with young people in eight Bay Area counties, and many come from the Richmond-San Pablo area.

Yosemite National Park was awarded \$40,000 for its Wildlink program of fully funded wilderness and community-based programs for underserved youths. The program also has many Richmond-San Pablo participants.

Learn more about the Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council online at <http://www.stewardshipcouncil.org>.