

Partnerships: Planting Trees, Restoring Struggling Ecosystem

On Saturday, January 28, 2023, the Anahuacalmecac International University Preparatory (K-12) hosted a community tree reforestation event at Ernest E. Debs Regional Park – where 500 trees are now setting roots in their new home. Thanks to the partnership with the Gabrielino-Shoshone Nation of Southern California, TreePeople, North East Trees, Audubon Center at Debs Park, CALFIRE, United States Forest Service, and the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, the planting was possible.

Ecological restoration of a culturally significant ecosystem was one of the core goals of this Indigenous-led event. Oak Woodlands and Walnut Foothills are the inspiring vision behind Anahuacalmecac’s native species choices: Coast Live Oak, SoCal Black Walnut, Blue Elderberry, and Toyon. “Besides food and medicinal purposes for our Native tribes, these trees represent sustainability to the current fragile ecosystem and hope to the generations to come,” stated Chief Nick Rocha of the Gabrielino Shoshone Tribal Council of Southern California, during the traditional opening ceremony.

The immense cultural significance, the important food sources for native and migratory birds in California, and the continual source of traditional crafts materials for Native Americans, are the reasons these trees represent life and hope to a struggling ecosystem saturated with non-native and invasive plants. The event showcased workshops engaging and inviting over 400 people in attendance to partake in the appreciation of the cultural and intellectual heritage of Indigenous Peoples.

All the partners expressed gratitude for the inclusion in the traditional cultural protocols to respectfully and meaningfully touch the land called Ernest Debs Regional Park and the land’s natural caretakers known as the *Nikan Chanekkeh*. “This is just the beginning of many partnership events,” commented Mr. Marcos Aguilar, co-founder and Executive Director of Semillas Sociedad Civil and Anahuacalmecac’s Co-Head of School. The event was a part of a year-long project awarded to Anahuacalmecac by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection through the US Forest Service’s State Urban Forest Resilience Grant Program.



Figure 1. Anahuacalmecac’s opening ceremony preparations at Debs Park. Students and educators led an inner circle surrounded by a greater circle made by over 400 people for opening protocols.



Figures 2 and 3. Ceremony preparations. Left: Student leaders at Anahuacalmecac learn that relationships to land are immersed in culture and meaning. Here students and parents prepare incense for ceremony. A student leader and Kitlapowa XinachOhtli or Wayfinder are kneeling on the green grass preparing incense. Right: Students and teachers preparing for ceremony. Two students kneeling on the green grass preparing incense. Music is important to celebration and making meaning. Through song and dance, Anahuacalmecac community members expressed joy and thanksgiving. Here, two traditional standing wood drums called wewetl made of tree trunks flank a ceremonial eagle and jaguar drum called a teponastli are pictured.



Figures 4 and 5. Left: Pauline Ordonez, USDA Forest Service, State & Private Forestry Resource Assistant, digging hole to plant tree. Right: Coast Live Oak seedling planted at Debs Park by USFS staff, Pauline Ordonez and Yassy Wilkins.