

2012: YEAR OF THE RANCHOS

Rancho Los Cerritos + 4600 Virginia Road, Long Beach, CA 90807
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Rancho Los Cerritos Site and Interpretive Enhancements

Project Overview:	Phase II of 25 year Master Plan: Construction of a visitor center, new entryway with enhanced security, restoration of the arroyo landscape, development of a joint use overflow parking lot in conjunction with the Virginia Country Club, and interpretive improvements
Design Team:	Heritage Architecture and Planning, San Diego, California NUVIS Landscape & Planning, Irvine, California
Construction:	Mark Sauer Construction
Archaeology:	Greenwood & Associates
City Project Team:	Andrew Olding, Capital Projects Coordinator, Department of Public Works Ellen Calomiris, Historic Sites Officer, Department of Parks, Recreation & Marine
Cost:	\$4.5 million

Project Details: Construction of a two-story Visitor Center based on the 1835 Cota Adobe; from street level it resembles a one-story adobe from the Mexican California era. The work included site preparation and demolition of modern restrooms, construction of the facility, site improvements including landscaping and irrigation, and parking for the disabled. The building is fully ADA accessible and includes public spaces for visitor arrival and orientation, an video theater, a changing exhibit area, a museum shop, restrooms, costume storage, and staff offices for a receptionist and volunteer coordinator. The Visitor Center accomplishes these vital goals: 1) Expand the "Visitors from the Past" living history program to improve visitors' experience and understanding of the site and interpret more fully the Rancho's Spanish and Mexican heritage; 2) explore historical themes in greater depth through innovative exhibits using the site's extensive archaeological, archival and historical collections; 3) open more of the 1844 adobe home for tours; 4) expand and diversify the Rancho's audience; and 5) encourage repeat visitation.

Adjacent to the Visitor Center is a 33,350 square foot arroyo -- the last significant open space on the 4.74-acre ranch property. Improvements were made to restore habitat, expand recreational use of the property, improve aesthetics and security, and address drainage issues. The area was planted with California native trees, shrubs and groundcovers, and a pathway was constructed that leads from Virginia Road along the edge of the arroyo to the Visitor Center. Eventually, outdoor exhibit panels will interpret the Tongva Indian village of Tibahangna, which lay near the present Los Angeles River along the Rancho's western boundary, and seating areas will provide visitors with opportunities for interpretation, resting and observation without encroachment into the arroyo habitat area.

A distinctive brick wall with pilasters and signage, new wooden gates, and a textured and paved circle design on Virginia Road just in front of the driveway were added to improve site security and create an unambiguous statement of arrival at this National and State Historic Landmark property. Prior to the Grand Opening in May, an overflow parking lot will be constructed across the street in collaboration with the Virginia Country Club.

Funding: The Rancho Los Cerritos Foundation took the lead in raised funds for these improvements through its Strong Roots, New Growth Capital Campaign. Key funding partners included:

The Ahmanson Foundation, Barbara and Bruce Ashwill, Bixby Land Company, Barbara Bixby Blackwell, California Cultural and Historical Endowment, City of Long Beach—Department of Parks, Recreation and Marine, Stephen and Fran Conley, Gordon and Ruth Dougherty Foundation, Stephen and Nancy Dudley Family Fund, Edison International, John Fielder and Donita Van Horik, Mr. and Mrs. William R. Halford, Vicki Holden The LeBurta Atherton Foundation, Long Beach Navy Memorial Heritage Association, Carmen and Bill Lorbeer, The Earl B. and Loraine H. Miller Foundation, The McLeod Family Foundation, Bettye E. Mitchell, Frank and Margie Newell, The Rudolph J. and Daphne A. Munzer Foundation, The Kenneth T. and Eileen L. Norris Foundation, NUVIS Landscape Architecture & Planning, The Parsons Foundation, Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, Jean Bixby Smith.