



MAXINE LERAL

Venice canals open after \$6 million restoration

City officials marked the official opening of the renovated Venice canal network north of the Marina Tuesday morning following a \$6 million restoration of the 88-year-old canal

network.

The project was funded in part by the city and with assessments against canal area properties.

The city abandoned sidewalks

along the canals in 1942 and the canal network slipped into decades of decay.

Canal area property owners and residents have been working for years to restore the canal



BERNICE ERICKSON

(Argonaut photos by David Asper Johnson)

network, but progress was delayed with bureaucratic red tape and a long series of squabbles among residents and property owners over assessment and environmental issues.

Even after the eventually successful restoration project began, residents continued to squabble among themselves and

with city officials over the type of material that should be used along the canal banks.

The 20-month restoration construction included draining the canals and removing what some residents called "80 years of muck."

Highlighting the restoration was reconstruction and repair of canal-side sidewalks and wooden pedestrian bridges. New vegetation was planted along the newly constructed canal banks.

Although powerboats will be prohibited in the canals, residents and the public will be able to use other types of boats, such as canoes and kayaks. The California Coastal Commission has granted permission for docks along the canal network to provide access to small boaters.

Tuesday morning, canal area residents and property owners expressed delight at the finished restoration project.

Ocean Avenue resident Pat Talbott was busy paddling her small boat around Carroll Canal as city officials gathered to dedicate the restored canal network.

Among the most delighted was Bernice Erickson, longtime canal area property owner and resident.

"I've been going to meetings for over 25 years to get these canals cleaned up," Erickson sighed.

She remembered the "early days" and canal cleanup pioneer, the late Henry Greene.

"Henry worked so hard — the poor man. I think he felt it would never get done," she added.

"But, now it's wonderful," Erickson said of the finished project. "It's worth waiting for."

Erickson remembered the many previous efforts and earlier plans to restore the canals.

"There were so many," she recalled. "They had beautiful architectural plans that were much, much too expensive, but they were so beautiful."

Not all of the early ideas were practical.

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"One man suggested a tunnel underground, rather than the bridges," Erickson laughed, adding, "but many of the ideas were down-to-earth on this project.

"In the beginning we paid high taxes — before Proposition 13 — and many of us almost gave up our property. Proposition 13 really saved us. Thank God we hung on to see this wonderful day."

Erickson owns two canal area parcels, including one vacant lot.

"We have practically all the dogs in the neighborhood coming onto our vacant lot, which we keep up nice and green," she said.

Another pleased local resident was Maxine Leral.

"Henry Coleman and I took out the petition in 1982" to get the present canal restoration project under way, Leral said.

"We have had our property since 1950 and built our home here in 1979. We have been very involved and have gone through all the improvement efforts."

Leral, too, suggested that the end result justified the years of effort.

"It has been wonderful," Leral said. "I am very happy with the way it turned out. We met all the government requirements.

"The hardest part was trying to come up with a design that was environmentally sensitive and to work with all the agencies and the requirements.

"You can see, the canals are beautiful," Leral said, beaming over the completed project.

"What it has done is to create a safe environment for the residents. In the 1940s the sidewalks were taken out of use. There were no safe areas," Leral said.