Tree Committee History
17 June 2013

The modern Rancho Cucamonga campus opened in Jan 1960 for 6 million dollars. Laura Hopkins, College President Dan Milliken’s secretary, designed the campus on the back of an envelope!

The Northrup Brothers (Curley and Gene) were the independent contractors who installed the irrigation systems on the campus.

Bill Grigsby was the Business Manager. To put it tactfully, he was extremely frugal. Richard Beeks, the Botanist at the college, and the Northrups worked to plant more volume and diversity than the few junipers and coyote bushes that Grigsby was willing to plant throughout the campus. The pressing goal was to cover the ground, due to the damage that the Santa Ana winds caused each fall.

When Jim des Lauriers (biology faculty) was hired in 1965, he and Beeks continued to provide advice on location and species of new trees, shrubs, grasses, wildflowers and succulents, and to collaborate with M&O on the oversight, care and maintenance of the grounds. This relationship between the biologists and M&O was unofficial and informal, and spanned the tenures of a number of supervisors, including Gale Carter, Jim Taylor, Wes Brickey, Bruce Cook, and Bob Cecil.

Eventually, Jim des Lauriers and Mark Hodnick, Grounds Supervisor under M&O Supervisor Jim Taylor, constituted the Grounds and Facilities Committee. Mark eventually left the college to do the same job for the city of Claremont (and later Indio). His position was not replaced until Raul Alvarado (grounds manager) was hired in 2007.

After Hodnick left Chaffey, and Beeks retired in 1980, Jim des Lauriers’ efforts on grounds and facilities alone were largely a personal interaction with the M&O Supervisors.

After Jim’s retirement in 1999, botanist Rose Ann Cobos took over as Chair of the Grounds and Facilities Committee (informally called the Tree Committee). The committee remained a creature of the biology department, in collaboration with M&O, until the college community became widely and more consciously interested in trees and grounds. Broad concern over trees and grounds occurred in the wake of two dramatic events relating to an area of campus that was considered a “sacred place” (as such outdoor spaces are called in the college landscaping literature).

In the area east of the VSS Building, where parking lot #23 now exists, there was a patch known as “Potters’ Field,” thus named because it reminded people of a little cemetery. The whole area was surrounded by a double row of Italian Stone Pines, interspersed with Modesto Ashes. On a Saturday in early 2000 the trees on the east and south sides were removed without any announcement to the college community. The Stone Pines on the north side of the parking lot are the remnant of that border. There was outrage throughout the campus on the following Monday, as faculty, staff and students arrived on campus and immediately noticed the missing trees.

A few years later the coral trees that had been planted along the east side of the VSS building after it was built, were also suddenly removed—with neither warning nor consultation. Ardon Alger (photography faculty and Faculty Senate President) communicated the outcry that went up throughout the campus to then Superintendent/President, Marie Kane, and he worked with Dr. Kane to formalize the “Tree Committee,” as a creature of the Faculty Senate, and its advisory role to the Superintendent/President. With its new role came a new title: the Trees, Plants, and Grounds Committee. Further, Dr. Kane allocated funding for landscaping projects, and Steve Menzel (Vice President, Administrative Services) continued to support the development of the college’s landscaping.

Rose Ann Cobos (biology faculty) continued in the role of Chair, initially accompanied by Co-Chair Bruce Cook (director of M&O), until late 2009. Under her leadership, the TC helped to steer the college through the Measure L construction. That effort dramatically diminished the construction’s many impacts upon the college’s trees, plants and grounds. In addition, the Tree Committee advised in the design of a great many new landscaping projects, and in the care of established landscaping (trees in particular).

Since August 2009, biologist Robin Ikeda has served as either Chair or Co-Chair, sharing leadership duties with Instructional Tech Sam Gaddie and most recently, biologist Sarah Cotton. The TC, M&O and Bernards collaborated with administration on a proposal to repair and complete the irrigation systems and to complete the landscaping on the Rancho Cucamonga campus, to inventory all of the district’s trees and place them on a schedule of routine maintenance, and to bring all of the irrigation systems onto a single, central controller. The proposal was approved by the Governing Board on 25 May 2011.

The Tree Committee has evolved into a large and highly collaborative committee, whose membership richly represents the diversity of roles and perspectives in the college.

The narrative is informed by the recollections of Jim des Lauriers, Ardon Alger, and Wes Brickey. Compiled by Robin Ikeda, who owns the errors and muddles. Please relay corrections to her.