



# The Caltech Y NEWS

*"Making a World of Difference"*

Since  
1916

## Announcements

### Studenski Award Endowment grows

*by Athena Castro, Y Executive Director*

The Caltech Y's Studenski Award Endowment Fund has recently received a generous increase in funding from the Studenski estate.

Dr. Eugene Studenski, father of Paul Studenski, for whom the award is named, made a provision for additional funds to be directed to the endowment upon his death. While we are saddened about the news of Dr. Studenski's recent passing, we are encouraged

by his foresight and desire to see the Studenski fund grow. As a result of this increased funding, the award will continue to benefit students for years to come.

The Studenski Award was established in memory of Paul Studenski, a former Caltech student, who was killed in an automobile accident while taking time from academics to reflect on possible directions for his future. The award was established by his parents to give Caltech students the opportunity to

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take time away from the academic community in order to obtain a better understanding of self and to consider and explore possible directions for his/her future.

### The Caltech Y receives Tournament of Roses grant

*by Athena Castro, Y Executive Director*

The Caltech Y is the proud recipient of a \$3,640 grant from the Tournament of Roses Foundation to be used toward the Wilderness First Aid course for outdoor leaders during 2008.

The Y's Outdoor Adventures Program promotes healthy living and active participation in the outdoors. Recent trips have included the annual Y hike to Mammoth, the Centennial Grove/Yosemite trip, and Zion National Park.

The Wilderness First Aid course will provide an introduction to necessary outdoor skills such as the ability to assess and treat injuries, how to respond to emergencies calmly and correctly, and the confidence to travel responsibly in the wilderness. Many thanks to the Tournament of Roses Foundation for funding this very important program!

### RISE Program report

*by Alycen Chan, Y RISE Program Coordinator*

The RISE students recently visited Pitzer College, one of the five colleges in the Claremont Colleges Consortium. Along with a campus tour, students learned about the social and environmental focus of the school including the newly built eco-friendly dorms. On the same day, students visited the special "Black Inventors Museum Exhibit," presented by the Pitzer College Black Student Union. In the upcoming months, RISE students will also visit Chapman University in Orange County and Occidental College in Los Angeles.

## Recent Events (March)

### Explore LA Series features LA Philharmonic

*by Leon Liu, '10, ExComm*

On March 4th, 2008, a group of twelve Caltech students (half undergrads), led by Excomm Members Shankar Kalyanaraman and Leon Liu, attended a fabulous concert by world-renowned pianist Lang Lang at the Walt Disney Concert Hall as part of the *Explore LA Series*.

The group arrived at the concert hall via the Metro. The concert began at 8 pm and lasted for approximately two and a half hours. The group was fortunate enough to have obtained seating in the choir area, in close proximity to the stage. Thus everyone had a great view of the performance. The concert was very successful, and almost every par-

ticipant expressed great satisfaction. The group returned to Caltech via shuttles.

Due to the high popularity of this event and limited number of tickets, participants this time were selected by lottery. It was suggested that more of this type of event could be planned in the future.

## Special Olympics dinner/dance a success

by Christina Weng '11

On Sunday, March 9, a special dinner and dance was held for *Special Olympics* athletes and their families in Dabney Hall. I had the privilege of meeting and talking to several of them. One was a power lifter who'd been with the *Special Olympics* since he was eight. There were bowlers, basketball players and track stars, and many had participated in more than one event.

Regardless of sport, all the athletes were excited about the dancing lesson. After the Caltech Ballroom Club gave a demonstration, the athletes and their family and friends took the floor under

the direction of the dance instructors. They picked up on the techniques very quickly, and the dizzying pace at which the steps were learned was immensely impressive. As the entire hall dissolved into a mass of swirling dresses, radiant smiles, music, and applause, it was difficult to distinguish between the athletes and volunteers.

We all love to laugh; we all love to dance, and we all love the presence of those who care. And though it may sound cliché, you can't help but think, looking at the scene, we aren't so different after all.

## Decompression delights

By Jonathan Tsai '10, ExComm

The Caltech Y's second term *Decompression* was held March 15 during finals week. The theme was the Beijing 2008 Summer Olympics and the Y had a lot of fun organizing the event. The seats were arranged in five rings *a la* the Olympic seal, and the T-shirts were designed with the Beijing mascots in mind. As always, there was a great amount of food and drink and all the students left happy and full and ready to take their finals.

## Alternative Spring Break engages three different locales

### Tijuana, Mexico

by Peter Liu '09, ExComm  
Photos by Iliia Shadrin '09

The Alternative Spring Break trip to Tijuana, Mexico, lasted four days for sixteen participants, including leaders Chris Kealey, Kenny Oslund, and Peter Liu.

The first day of the trip was mostly spent traveling to Tijuana and finding our home for the next few days, Casa del Migrante. The Casa is a sort of shelter for migrants who have been recently deported from the United States and have nowhere to live in Mexico. Migrants are allowed to stay at the home for about 12 days, and are given clean sheets and warm dinners on the condition that they look for work during the day to support themselves.

Though many of the students could not speak Spanish, all of the students took



the effort to cross the language barrier and meet migrants who knew a little English or tried to speak through some of the more fluent speakers in the group. Each story was unique in its own way, but we could not help but notice that there were similarities between many of the migrants.

During the day, while the migrants were out looking for work, Hector, the volunteer coordinator of the Casa, led us to a small orphanage on the outer parts of Tijuana. Many of us spent time cleaning up the backyard and removing dangerous objects and constructions sticking out of the ground. Others spent the time constructing new shelves and a closet for the children's clothes.

When we arrived, much of their donated clothes was randomly thrown together, so the new shelves will allow the women who work at the orphanage

to manage those better. In addition, those women were also kind enough to cook us lunch for both days we served there, and graciously allowed us to play with the children.

Many of the participants, including the leaders, were surprised at just how rewarding the entire trip was. Everyone had an enlightening time to see two very different scenarios and stories: that of migrants, and that of orphans. One of the freshmen participants commented that, even though he only spent two days helping people in such a small way, he can't imagine going through the rest of his life without making service of others a higher priority in his life. We all returned home safe and sound, encouraged by the trip, and grateful for a wonderful experience.



## Alternative Spring Break (continued)

### Owens Valley

by Sunny Chun '10, ExComm

The Owens Valley site has been a regular on the Caltech Y's list of Alternative Spring Break trips for the past five years. The emphasis of this trip is to broaden students' understanding of current environmental and economic issues starting with an introduction to how and from where our neighbor, Los Angeles, acquires enough water for its millions of consumers. The 2008 Owens Valley team was made up of 10 students plus Athena Castro.

Early Monday morning, we drove up to our lodgings at the small roadside town of Lone Pine and enjoyed the scenic journey and backdrop of the place – lots of mountains and dry lake-bed. Tour guide and environmental activist, Mike Prather, helped us to learn about the long history of water



issues, toured us around the Owens Lake bed and the federal dust control project, and took us to our work site. Working with the Bureau of Land and Management, we helped disguise illegal dirt paths, carved by recreational vehicle users, by a process called “vertical mulching” – planting dead brush to hide the road from view – and by transferring live brush to restore nature in that area. We were told that the Caltech group is the biggest volunteer group they get each year to help on these projects. In two days, we covered one road in the Alabama Hills successfully with much digging and raking.

Water was reintroduced to the lower Owens River in December 2006 after decades of struggle, and the changes could be seen even in the late winter-time of the desert. The shallow stream

that trickles through the valley is a triumphant symbol for the Owens Valley. Later, there was also a tour of the LA aqueducts by LA Department of Water and Power, which gave us access past “authorized vehicles only” gates.

Perks on the trip included outings to the local film museum, which proudly houses memorabilia of the many famous western movies that were filmed in the area and included for us a screening of the more recent thriller, Tremors. The historical national monument of Manzanar, the Japanese internment camp, was also down the road to visit. Lastly, a stop at the beautiful Fossil Falls completed the Owens Valley trip on Thursday. A very good time was had by all. Being Techers, some of our best moments happened while playing a Trivia game made in the 1980s.



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### New Orleans

by Leon Liu '10, ExComm,  
Susan Shen '09, ExComm,  
Alan Kwan, Grad

Two and a half years after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, the world's attention has waned, but in many areas, the wounds of the storm's physical destruction and social disruption remain fresh. In New Orleans, only 60% pre-hurricane population of 48500 has returned and about half of schools have reopened, and many neighborhoods are still littered with facades and foundations from better days.

Amidst the ruins and evident deficiencies of official recovery efforts, though, dedicated individuals and community organizations are taking the initiative to lead the city's restora-



tion. During their Alternative Spring Break Trip on March 24-29, a group of twelve members of the Caltech community – nine undergrads, one grad student, and two Caltech Y staff members – visited New Orleans to witness the situation in the city firsthand, to learn about the combination of social, economic, and political factors that affect recovery efforts, to provide as-

sistance to some of these organizations in their efforts, and lastly, to appreciate the unique culture and history of New Orleans.

The Caltech team partnered with Common Ground, a local organization (<http://www.commongroundrelief.org>), engaged in a host of development activities, including rebuilding homes, providing legal assistance to residents, restoring wetlands, bioremediating soils, raising a community garden, and increasing access to information technology resources. Before starting on projects, they met with Sakura Kone at Common Ground's base in the Lower Ninth Ward. Kone gave an overview of the area's history and its challenges, and gave a tour of Common Ground's projects in the Lower Ninth Ward.

(continued)

### Alternative Spring Break (continued)

While the effects of the storm's destruction and society's subsequent neglect are readily observable here, so too are the seeds of progress that Common Ground has planted – the health clinic, community garden, refurbished homes, the legal aid office, and supply distribution center.

The Caltech team soon immersed themselves in their project. Under the guidance of Geoffrey Hennies of Common Ground Tech, as well as Sloan and Greg, they installed two computer labs using equipment donated by Lockheed-Martin, along with some parts donated by Caltech Information Management Systems and Services (IMSS). Before the installations, Hennies led a quick tutorial on computer hardware installation, the open source Edubuntu operating system, and how to make Ethernet cables. The donated computers were refurbished and tested before being brought out to the lab sites, where the hardware, software, and network connections were installed.

First, the group went to Blackstar Academy, a learning center for kids. Baakir Tyehimba and his wife, Lisa, had converted their house into a comfortable after-school refuge with couches, books, and empty desks that awaited computers. The Caltech team set to work, installing the computers and setting up Ethernet connections. In the afternoon, as Edubuntu was installing on the computers, the group visited the nearby Craige Cultural Center. Accompanying the group was Angelo, a member of Blackstar Academy, who was graduating from high school early, as a junior, and hoped to go to MIT (although after meeting the Caltech students, he became interested in Caltech). Upon arriving at the Craige Cultural Center, Angelo gave an enthusiastic tour of the community center, which had been founded by his father. Before ending the day, Geoffrey and Greg brought the Caltech group to the Common Ground Health Clinic, a free health clinic, where the friendly staff welcomed them. Bidding their farewells, the Caltech group agreed they had met many dedicated



people that day.

In addition to the one at Blackstar Academy, the Caltech volunteers set up another computer lab at the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward Village, a community center for the youth of the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward. The situation there was much different from that at Blackstar. Initially, there was neither furniture nor electricity in what would be the computer lab. No door had been installed, and the walls were still covered by black plastic sheets. The group had to start from scratch, but by the end of the day, the empty room was transformed into a brightly lit computer lab.

First, the group received a warm welcome by the director the Village, Ward (Mack) McClendon, who inspired the participants with his speech describing the importance of service and his own personal conviction for serving the community. He had originally intended for the site of the Village to be an antique car showroom, but he decided instead to turn it into a community center. Because McClendon expected many displaced families to return to the neighborhood after the current school year, he was anxious to get the Village up and running as soon as possible.

In the morning, while an electrician was connecting electricity and Internet to the lab, the group visited the St. Bernard Community Center where they helped with moving, sorting the inventory and checking out items for the food and clothing bank there.

When electricity and Internet were ready, the volunteers had only a couple of hours to set up an entire computer lab in an empty room. But with their experience from setting up the lab at

Blackstar the previous day, the group worked efficiently. They quickly divided up the work, with some making Ethernet cables and others hooking up computers. Once started, the group worked with such swiftness that the speed of progress was limited only by the speed of the Internet and computers. At the end of the day, most computers were ready, save for the ones with hardware failures, which were fixed by a few members of the group the next morning. According to Mack, the lab would be used in the future for computer lessons and Internet access for members of the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward community. He announced that he had already found a teacher who would be helping local youth use the computer lab to tell their personal stories, which will be one step to the community's emotional recovery.

The next day, while some students were finishing up the work at the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward Village, the rest of the group revisited the Common Ground site. At Common Ground, the students tested computer equipment, installed a printer, and helped with dry walling. By midday, the tasks at both Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward Village and Common Ground had been completed.

Besides working, the group also had some fun exploring and enjoying the cultural and historical aspects of the city. They visited the main tourist attraction, the French Quarter, and attended a jazz concert at the famous Preservation Hall. The group also visited the Destrehan plantation, one of the first European settlements in the region, and learned about the evolution of socioeconomic relations among the different groups of people who settled there.

In conclusion, the Caltech Y service trip to New Orleans was successful. The participants enjoyed their working experience as well as their interactions with the local community, and the locals appreciated our show of concern and our earnest effort spent for rebuilding their community. It was a memorable experience for everyone.

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## Meet the ExComm

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Each month the Caltech Y News interviews a member of the Student Executive Committee (ExComm)

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### Natalie Becerra '08

by Molly Jones, Y Student Activities Coordinator



Natalie Becerra is committed to making a difference. From her work as co-president of Engineers for Sustainable Development, coordination of a Science for Social Impact Forum to her participation on the ExComm, it is undeniable that Natalie is putting her energy behind the causes she believes in.

Now a senior, Natalie has been involved with the Caltech Y since her sophomore year. She has helped to lead the *Huntington Garden Tea*, Decompression, and sites for *Make-A-*

*Difference Day*. She finds the Caltech Y to be a place where she can impact Caltech and appreciates the opportunities that the Y provides.

This spring Natalie will graduate with a degree in mechanical engineering. In addition to completing the rigorous undergraduate coursework, Natalie has spent countless hours investigating and recording the “booming and burping” sounds of a particular set of sand dunes during her time at Caltech. This work has fueled Natalie’s interest in science research and has led to her submission of applications for civil and environmental engineering Ph.D. programs.

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## Voices of the Y Board

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### Bob Perpall

Alumni Member, Y Board

One needs only to read the March 2008 issue of *The Caltech Y News* to understand the breadth and depth of the robust, vibrant organization known as “The Caltech Y”.

I graduated from Caltech in 1952 with a BS/ME degree and returned in 1955-56 to earn an MS/ME degree. Since then, I have been active with the Alumni Association, The Caltech Associates, SURF and the Caltech Y.

My first experience with the Y, as an undergraduate, made me feel at home and comfortable at Caltech in spite of the heavy academic load. The Y program at that time was not nearly as extensive as it is now, but the concept was the same. The Y provides another dimension to the Caltech students’ experience that cannot be achieved in the classroom.

What I especially like about the Y is that it comprises programs and activities that are conceived, planned and executed by the students. This is facilitated by a dedicated staff and an active board of directors. These programs and activities include outdoor adventures, social opportunities, and community involvement activities such as “Make a Difference Day”, the *RISE Tutoring* program and “Alternative Spring Break”.

Caltech graduates, by virtue of the Institute’s admission standards, are destined to be among our leaders in the future. It is because I want to help to develop these leaders that I joined the Y Board and have contributed time, talent and treasure to the program. Experience with the Y in planning activities will no doubt give them confidence to go forward as leaders in

their chosen fields. They will also have the background to be leaders in their home communities and in the world at large.



## Greetings from an Ex ExComm

### Elizabeth (Elisa) Chiang '01

I attended Caltech from 1997 until 2001, and joined the Caltech Y the second quarter of my freshman year. The Y had just moved into Steele house from Winnett at that time. I'm not sure what first brought me to the Y. I do remember going to my first decompression and seeing many people from my house (Blacker) volunteering and wearing cool Caltech Y T-shirts. I think that's what got me asking, "What is the Caltech Y?"

I attended an Ex-Comm meeting and I think, within the first few meetings, somehow volunteered to organize a volunteer activity for Alternative Spring Break. I set up a trip for Caltech students to work on a Habitat for Humanity house in Duarte. I started volunteering at Decompression,

tutoring students after school, and volunteering with Huntington Gardens. When elections came up, I was voted as the new secretary.

The Caltech Y became my main source of decompression, not just during finals week, but, throughout the year. It was my main activity outside of the rigorous academics of Caltech. It became the place I went to for outdoor activities, volunteer activities, and social activities. I went on hikes, backpacking trips, and beach clean ups. During Spring break, I went to Arizona to work on an Indian Reservation and Tecolote to help out at a community center. The Caltech Y is what brought balance to my life as a Techer.

I am now an MD/PhD student at Case Western Reserve University. I have completed my PhD in neuroscience, studying the electrophysiological properties of the principle cells of the olfactory tubercle in the Strowbridge lab, and will start medical rotations in July 2008. I still enjoy hiking and backpacking (and had to spend a whole bunch of money buying my own equipment after leaving Caltech), though I don't do very much volunteer work anymore. I love to visit Athena and other members of the Y board when I come back to Pasadena. I have very fond memories of the Caltech Y and remain a Friend of the Caltech Y. My closest friends are still friends that were also actively involved in the Caltech Y.



Hiking with Ex ExComm Andrew Hafer '01



Hiking with Ex ExComm Bryan Eastin '01



Feeding Lemurs with Ex ExComm Celeste Yang '01

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## Coming Events (April)

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### April Preview

by Greg Fletcher, Y Student Activities & Community Services Director

As Spring Term begins, the Y-ExComm, Y-Outdoors committee, Community Service coordinators, and Social Activism Speaker Series committee are still working to make sure that April showers campus with more exciting programs.

- The month starts right off with **Pre-Frosh Weekend**, but we don't stop there. Coming soon:

- April features one of the largest and, perhaps, most important programs of the year in the annual **Make A Difference Day**. This year, the ExComm and other student leaders have developed over 15 projects with local service agencies, including: environmentally focused projects with Tree People, Santa Monica Trail Coalition, Heal the Bay, and an environmental charter school; academic enhancement at Mark Keppel High and Science Olympiad; visitation at The Terraces, Vista Nova, and Villa Esperanza; construction with Habitat for Humanity, Boy's & Girl's Club, Rebuilding Together; clean up work at Elizabeth House; and children's focus with Hillside Home, Rosemary Children's Service, and Five Acres. Staff and board members will come together to assist in set up, driving, and registration duties at the Y

central office.

- Our leaders from the *Y-Outdoors* committee are busy putting the final touches on their plan for a weekend camping trip to **Bryce Canyon National Park**. Although there have been several large trips to Zion National Park, this will be the first Y trip to Bryce.

Also in the works are two **Adventure 101** lunches – one focused on Bike Touring and the other on Map and Compass Navigation. *Adventure 101* keeps things close to home with a series of short workshops and presentations right on the Caltech campus that instruct and inspire students to explore adventure options they may not have considered.

*Y-Outdoors* programs provide Caltech students, including novices and experienced outdoor enthusiasts, an exciting opportunity to explore with guidance.

- Our spring term **PALAC** (Pasadena

Area Liberal Arts Center) event will feature Jonathan Tsai and Peter Liu facilitating a discussion around an article which explores gene therapy and the treatment of inherited disease by replacing the defective gene(s) with normal gene(s). The students will also discuss their own work at Caltech's Baltimore Lab. Along with board member Norri Sirri, the team will welcome to campus members of the community interested in this unique learning opportunity.

- **The Social Activism Speaker Series** (SASS) will continue with a screening and discussion of a thought-provoking and powerful documentary film on the current and historical root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "Occupation 101" shares opinion, and explores controversial perspectives, that have often been under-reported in the mainstream media.

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## Spring Friends Dinner features Spencer Black

by Chris Kealey, Y Marketing & Development Director

As part of a campus-wide celebration of Earth Day, Wisconsin State Representative Spencer Black will be the guest speaker at the Caltech Y spring Friends Dinner on April 24th at the Athenaeum.

Representative Black, a leading environmental advocate, author of numerous environmental laws, and proud father of a current Caltech undergraduate, will shed some light on the role of science and environmental politics. As

we ask ourselves, "What have we learned since the first Earth Day?", Spencer Black will share his insights, as ranking member of the Assembly's Natural Resource Committee, and personal stories of his mentor and friend Gaylord Nelson, the founder of Earth Day.

Dinner tickets are \$60 each. More information can be found at:

<http://www.caltechY.org/support/events>



# CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Note: See [Caltech Y website](#) for additional information and schedule updates

April

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1 <b>ExComm Mtg</b> RISE Tutoring Boys & Girls Club Tutoring	2 RISE Tutoring	3 RISE Tutoring <b>Pre-Frosh Weekend</b>	4 <b>Pre-Frosh Weekend</b>	5 <b>Pre-Frosh Weekend</b>
6 <b>Pre-Frosh Weekend</b>	7 <b>ExComm Mtg</b> RISE Tutoring <b>Y Board Mtg</b>	8 <b>ExComm Mtg</b> Boys & Girls Club Tutoring	9	10	11	12 <b>Make-A- Difference Day</b>
13	14 RISE Tutoring	15 <b>ExComm Mtg</b> RISE Tutoring Boys & Girls Club Tutoring	16 Adventure 101 Cycling RISE Tutoring <b>PALAC</b>	17 RISE Tutoring <b>GAYpril Comedy</b>	18 <b>Bryce Canyon Trip</b>	19 Union Station <b>Bryce Canyon Trip</b>
20 <b>Bryce Canyon Trip</b>	21 RISE Tutoring	22 <b>ExComm Mtg</b> Boys & Girls Club Tutoring <b>SASS Occupation 101</b>	23 RISE Tutoring	24 RISE Tutoring <b>Friends Dinner</b>	25	26
27	28 RISE Tutoring	29 <b>ExComm Mtg</b> RISE Tutoring Boys & Girls Club Tutoring	30 Adventure 101 Map & Compass RISE Tutoring			

## The Caltech Y

The Caltech Y is an independent 501c3 organization formally affiliated with the California Institute of Technology. The Y mission is to enrich student life and challenge students to grow into responsible citizens of the world.

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Athena Castro - Executive Director  
Greg Fletcher - Student Activities & Community Service Director  
Christopher Kealey - Marketing & Development Director  
Alycen Chan - RISE Coordinator  
Molly Jones - Student Activities Coordinator  
Carmelita Hearn - Administrative Assistant

### Board of Directors

#### Executive Committee

Carolyn Ash - Chair  
Lee Fisher - Vice Chair  
Peter Mason - Treasurer  
Barbara Heublein - Secretary  
Peter Liu - Student ExComm President

#### Members (\* indicates Student Executive Committee)

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Shirley Cohen	Eric Hochberg	Leon Liu*	Toni Perpall	Norri Sirri	

### The Caltech Y News

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