

## The Santa Barbara Association of Realtors is Awarded the 2013 Water Hero Award

The Santa Barbara Association of Realtors (SBAOR) was awarded the 2013 Water Hero Award for their new rainwater demonstration garden. The City gives out the award every year to highlight individuals, businesses, and organizations that go above and beyond in their water conservation efforts and serve as an example of resource efficiency in our community.



Located on Chapala Street in downtown Santa Barbara, SBAOR used to have a basic lawn in front of their office, but this past fall, they decided to upgrade their landscaping to something water wise. “I would watch the sprinklers come on 3 times a week, and I realized that no one ever plays on that grass, so why should we as a commercial building have grass?” asked Bob Hart, Executive Director of SBAOR. They had also experienced problems with basement flooding due to the constant watering of the lawn, poor drainage, and rain gutters and drains that slanted toward the basement.

To combat all of these issues, Daniel Wilson, of Wilson Environmental Contracting, Inc. was brought on board to help turn this resource hungry garden into a model for sustainability. The first step? Direct all water (rain and irrigation) away from the foundation. The lawn was pulled out and the bare ground was contoured to slowly direct water away from the building and into the garden. A dry creek bed and large swales were formed to collect and slowly seep the rainwater into the soil during heavy rains.

The gutters were redirected to the front garden and pitched away from the building so they would spread out into the landscape. Hard surfaces were also removed to allow for greater rainwater penetration; the front concrete path was reduced by 60% and split up into pavers. This would allow for the rainwater to slow, spread, and sink and result in less water running down the street and picking up pollutants before heading out to the ocean.



The new plants will require much less water and maintenance. More water loving plants were placed next to the swales to benefit from the water collecting there, and all of the plants are water wise or California natives. A mandarin tree adds shade, privacy screening, and edible fruit, helping to show that landscapes can be both beautiful and functional.



The old lawn sprinkler system was easily retrofitted to a low flow, low pressure drip system and “once this landscape is established, it is estimated that it will reduce the water consumption by 75-85%,” said Daniel Wilson. Additionally, the maintenance required is expected to drop by 99%! The old garden required mowing once a week, quarterly fertilizing, and weekly hauling of green waste. Now it will only require quarterly pruning for shaping, no power tools needed.

The new rainwater demonstration garden is a showcase property for the realtors that come there and the community in general. Chapala Street has a lot of foot and car traffic, and many passersby have stopped to take a look at the new landscaping. An interpretive sign is in the works, highlighting the sustainable features of the garden.

The Association of Realtors saw the value in a landscape that adds to the environment rather than being a draw on it. Their lawn was a high consumer of resources and the realtors understood that curb appeal is not front lawns. One of the goals of the project was to “have a wonderful demonstration garden to show people that you can have a beautiful entry to your home without it being grass,” said Bob Hart. Native and water wise gardens add beauty and color to a property, while also being less expensive and low maintenance. Congratulations to the Santa Barbara Association of Realtors for being a Water Hero!

