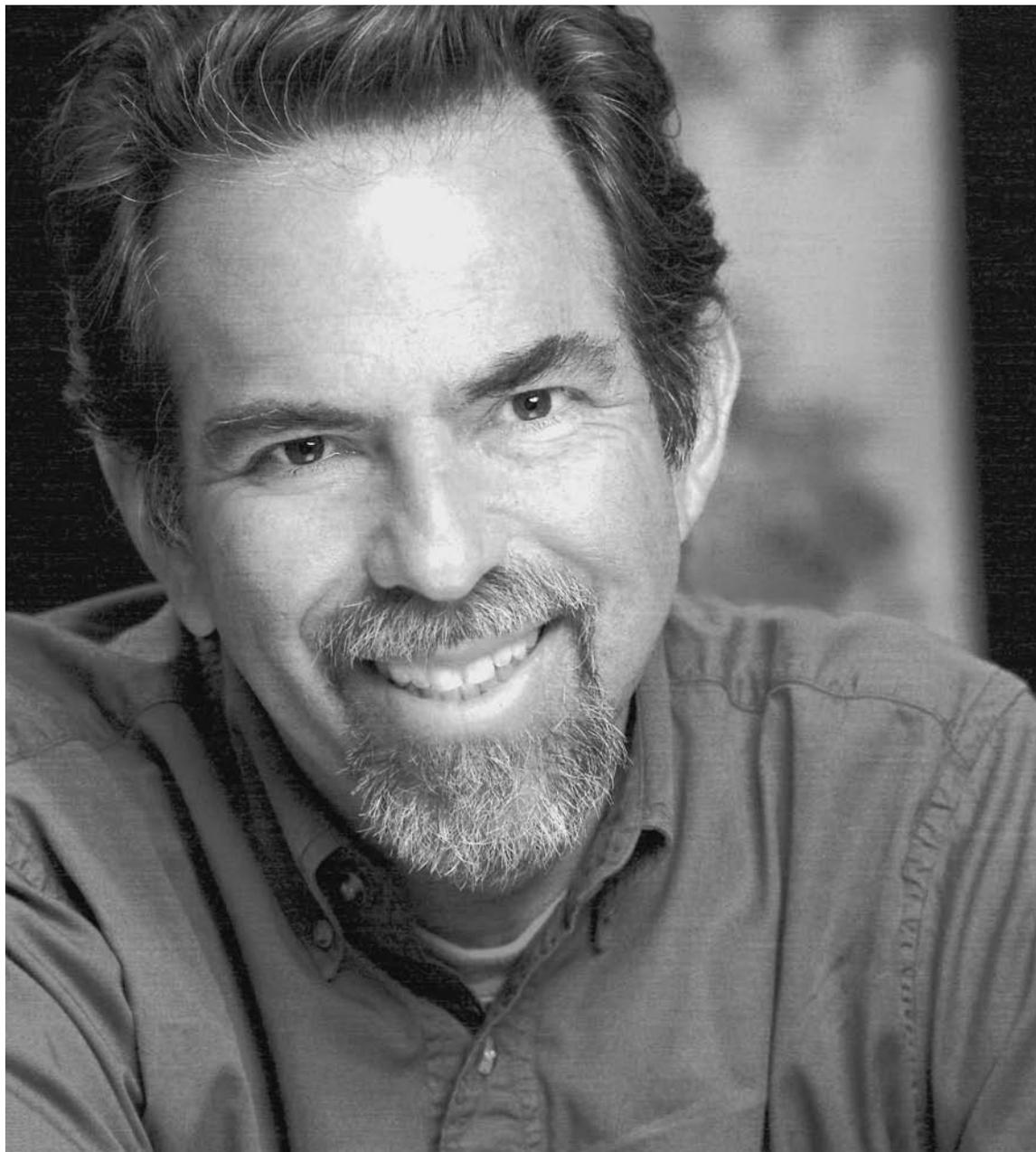


TreePeople

Roots for **L.A.**



*Founder Andy Lipkis envisions
a new model for sustainability.*

B Y E N R I Q U E G I L I

High above the freeway and the hubbub of Los Angeles city traffic, at the intersection of Mulholland Drive and Coldwater Canyon, TreePeople founder Andy Lipkis is on a very tight schedule. In fact, one-on-one time with this garrulous leader of one of the nation's premier urban forestry groups is limited. He works from the early morning hours well into the evening, attending a whirlwind of committee meetings, conference calls and press interviews.

Today, a PBS film crew is on hand to document the comings and goings of Lipkis, one of several prominent activists from around the country to appear in *Edens Lost and Found*, a documentary profiling those individuals who offer innovative solutions to problems affecting the global commons, from global warming to air pollution.

"Andy Lipkis is instrumental to understanding sustainability issues in Los Angeles and the future of this city, which is the focus of this broadcast," explained associate producer Robin Rosenfeld. The documentary, which debuts next spring, highlights ways to bring nature back to sprawling cities—and not a moment too soon.

The visual landscape of densely populated Los Angeles provides few clues to what was once a vast wilderness. Prime grizzly bear country is now home to shopping malls that endanger butterfly habitats. Vast tracts of real estate development have consumed a place of incredible beauty that's now lost the qualities that drew many people to Southern California in the first place.

On camera, Lipkis, flanked by his assistant and followed by a sound man under the glare of high-intensity lighting, strides down a narrow walkway. He takes a seat at an outdoor picnic table and almost immediately begins fulminating on the problems confronting Los Angeles, everything from too much pavement to L.A.'s odd water logic.

Water, or the misuse of it, keeps Lipkis animated. Interviewing him is like trying to ford a fast-flowing river, as a cascade of information pours from him. He's not quotable so much as he's immersive. Simple, open-ended questions lead to 20-minute monologues. The conversation meanders as he wends his way from subject to subject, nimbly braiding a personal narrative linked to the greater history of Los Angeles.

Lipkis has been pondering L.A.'s resource issues for the past 30 years. He's an urban arborist by trade and a problem solver by nature. As the founder of TreePeople, he's at the helm of a nonprofit organization dedicated to finding solutions to everything from cooling asphalt schoolyards to landscaping dreary boulevards.

Most recently, he's been seeking an alternative future for Los Angeles, one that doesn't rely on imported water and doesn't flush polluted rainwater into the Santa Monica Harbor.

The Seed First Sown

Lipkis' odyssey began with the simple act of planting a tree at summer camp. That single event has blossomed into a lifelong career.

By the late '50s, L.A. was "smog central," a miasma of car exhaust and carbon monoxide that coiled around city buildings and rolled eastward, blanketing mountainsides. Scientists observed that trees in

the San Bernardino National Forest were dying and attributed the devastation to poor air quality conditions.

Young Lipkis knew something was amiss when he felt a shortness of breath just walking home from school at day's end. A native of Los Angeles, he felt compelled to do something about it.

His passion for nature blossomed at an early age, and he discovered his first love while attending summer camp in the mountains of San Bernardino. Converting an abandoned parking lot into an alpine meadow was Lipkis' first introduction to the joys of forestry and the transformative power of planting trees. "We were outdoors, working our butts off and loving it," he says.

Lipkis came of age during the counterculture movement when idealism mixed with politics. His speech reflects those lessons. Leaning forward in his chair, the conversation is peppered with phrases such as "environmental justice," "economic empowerment" and "underserved communities"—polite terms for trashed neighborhoods, jobs and the ghetto.

"We're not fuzzy, tree-hugging do-gooders," insists Lipkis, who touts the benefits of trees not just for their aesthetic value but as a way to revive blighted communities. In a bleak corner of South Los Angeles, TreePeople first provided technical assistance to residents as a means of obtaining funding and securing permits for trees.

"All kinds of people turned out. We had gang members busting cement and planting trees," Lipkis proudly remembers. "Afterward, the residents gave the community a name and formed a neighborhood watch group."

Lipkis and, by extension, TreePeople, is almost single-handedly responsible for raising people's awareness of trees in Los Angeles. "Our core is inspiring, educating and supporting people as they take action to improve the quality of life where they live," he says. The group is renowned for achieving the seemingly impossible.

In fact, August marks the 20th anniversary of TreePeople's bold initiative, in which members planted 1 million trees in time for the 1984 Summer Olympics. And TreePeople's outreach programs have helped the city achieve a 90-percent compliance rate for its curbside recycling program, far exceeding anyone's expectations.

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Down the Drain

Lipkis' projects were, by all accounts, wildly successful. Yet, by the mid-'90s, he had every reason to be discouraged. Urban sprawl threatened to undermine everything TreePeople had accomplished. "We were not managing the city as a living ecosystem," laments Lipkis. "It was being managed as an inert piece of concrete, as if nature's cycle didn't exist."

After a great deal of introspection, Lipkis decided TreePeople needed to change direction. The Rodney King riots served as a catalyst. As Los Angeles lay smoldering, Lipkis had a revelation: to treat L.A.'s mudslides, floods and droughts as one single problem.

The city has been built with little regard for natural rhythms; despite a benign climate, Los Angeles is at the mercy of the weather. It's ironic that we suffer from both droughts and floods. Winter arrives with one great whoosh of water followed by months of no rainfall. Every drop after March comes from the Owens Valley and Northern California.

Two massive public works systems governed by separate agencies convey water to and from Los Angeles. Aqueducts hundreds of miles away deliver roughly 85 percent of our water. Meanwhile, to prevent neighborhoods from flooding, rainwater is diverted into cement storm drains to be whisked away when drops begin to fall.

Making matters worse, to meet the increasing demand for housing, developers have scrapped the region's water-absorbing chaparral and sage ecosystem. With at least 60 percent of Los Angeles now covered in concrete and pavement, large quantities

of motor oil, debris and yard waste flow down storm drains directly into the ocean during rainstorms. The results are polluted waterways and a water supply incapable of meeting residents' needs.

The city is under the gun to find a solution—L.A. is woefully behind in meeting state and federal guidelines governing water quality emissions and abating smog conditions. After winter storms, Santa Monica Bay routinely flunks clean water standards.

Lipkis was tired of seeing a valuable resource literally go down the drain while Los Angeles imported roughly \$150 million dollars worth of water annually. "I began thinking that this was really insane," Lipkis says, explaining that if the city captured its rainfall, it could replace half of the water it imports. Believing cooperation is key to salvaging greater Los Angeles, he hatched an ingenious plan to re-engineer all of Los Angeles from an urban concrete jungle to a sustainable watershed. "I began to see that we needed to advocate and provide guidance for integrated management of urban infrastructure as a way to stop the hemorrhage of cash, water and resources out of the city, taking with them jobs and opportunity," Lipkis says.

For the past 10 years, he's been advocating the collaborative approach through T.R.E.E.S. (Trans-Agency Resources Environmental and Economic Sustainability), Lipkis' cornerstone for overhauling the city's urban infrastructure.

TreePeople has found its next challenge in getting the city's lethargic bureaucracies to cooperate. Retrofitting an entire city infrastructure may seem impossible, but Lipkis will tell you it's not only possible, it's economically sound in the long run.

Shaping L.A.'s Water Future

In 1997, Lipkis brought together 75 landscapers, building architects, urban planners, urban foresters, community activists and government officials from around the country to brainstorm ways to address L.A.'s dual problems of water shortages and flooding. The experts agreed that the best technique to conserve water was to retrofit building sites. After four days of hands-on workshops, they arrived at a series of best management practices for five buildings: a single-family home, a school, an apartment building, a mini-mall and an industrial site.

One year later, one such building was a reality.

Greening the World

Los Angeles is but a small part of the greater world forest. Join Lynne Twist, founder of Pachamama Alliance; Atossa Soltari, founder & executive director of Amazon Watch; and Todd Paglia, executive director of Forest Ethics on Sunday, July 18 from 7 to 9 p.m., when TreePeople holds the first of its Green Series events.

"Our Ecological Footprint—The International Forest" will talk about how a drop of oil impacts our downstream neighbors in the Amazon rainforest; how corporate buyers and sellers of wood/paper/pulp products are protecting or destroying endangered forests; and what U.S. activists and indigenous shamans have in common.

Location: S. Mark Taper Foundation Amphitheatre in Coldwater Canyon Park, 12601 Mulholland Dr., Beverly Hills. R.S.V.P. 888.922.3846. \$5 for members, \$10 for nonmembers.

TreePeople also hosts regular tree plantings in various locations around Los Angeles. For more info, tap into www.treepeople.org.



TreePeople staff members meet in yurts, domed tents inspired by nomadic tribes of Siberia.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF TREEPEOPLE

EVENTS

Health Faire: July 11 @ 11am-6pm

Lectures • Demos • Group Healings

11:30 a.m. **PsychoPolarity Alignment** with Ray Doktor, CHt

1:00 p.m. **Non-Surgical Face Lifts** with Linda Ferrero

1:45 p.m. **Tonal Healing** with Ayamanatara

2:30 p.m. **TransCrystal Therapy** with Asheme Patricia, TCT, RM, CHt

4:00 p.m. **Quantum Energy Disciplines** with Marta Gordon

SPECIAL GIFTS & PREMIUMS WITH ANY PURCHASE

CLASSES

July 16-18 **Melchizedek: Level Four**

July 17 **Intro to Tonal Healing**

July 23-25 **Medicine Wheel Teachings Intensive**

July 24 **Celtic Rune Workshop**

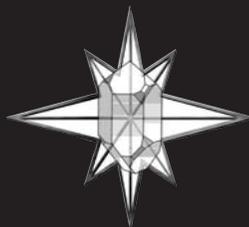
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PHOTO: COURTESY OF TREEPEOPLE

A modest bungalow in South Central Los Angeles had been re-landscaped and retrofitted with a 3,600-gallon cistern, a water pump and a dry well.

A modest bungalow in South Central Los Angeles had been re-landscaped and retrofitted with a 3,600-gallon cistern, a water pump and a dry well. Lipkis invited the media, city officials and local stakeholders to witness the home, as it was bombarded with 4,000 gallons of water.

Carl Blum, the then-deputy director of the county Department of Public Works (DPW), was on hand to witness the water works. Instead of cascading down the driveway into the storm drain, destined for the ocean, every drop of water was captured for irrigation purposes. Lipkis' demonstration convinced county officials that if it's possible to retrofit one house, then retrofitting an entire neighborhood was conceivable.

Relying on imported water could become a thing of the past in Los Angeles—a powerful lesson in water conservation that desert cities such as Tucson, Las Vegas and Albuquerque can learn from. If fully implemented,

TreePeople estimates the city's water requirements will be reduced by 50 percent and an additional 50,000 jobs will be created—along with a new generation of urban foresters. Retrofitting Los Angeles will require legions of workers trained to install cisterns and to plant the trees necessary to keep the city verdant.

Expanding TreePeople's mission to create a healthier, more sustainable Los Angeles is an ambitious undertaking. But it's a challenge Lipkis is ready to embrace. "We must deepen and expand our work," he says. "We are leaning toward expanding our mission from 'inspiring people to take personal responsibility for the environment/urban forest,' to something like, 'inspiring people to take personal responsibility and participate in making Southern California a sustainable urban environment.'" **WLT**

Enrique Gili is a freelance writer based in San Diego.

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Stabilizing Sun Valley

The working-class, predominantly Hispanic neighborhood of Sun Valley lacks storm drains, and with each passing shower, the roadways quickly become impassable.

In contrast to the months of annual drought, residents are routinely stranded in their homes during rainstorms, and flooding endangers the safety of their children. "On rainy days, parents form convoys to school and open their car doors, allowing kids to hop from vehicle to vehicle," says Sun Valley's project manager Vik Bapna.

TreePeople founder Andy Lipkis is now the spokesperson for an ambitious tree and water management project focusing on this 4.4-square-mile pocket of northern Los Angeles. Lipkis' master plan provides many sustainable benefits and has 15 to 18 design components, depending upon how much funding is allocated to the project.

The makeover focuses on the perennially flooded Tuxford/San Fernando intersection. But over a three- to five-year period, the entire neighborhood will be overhauled. Thousands of trees will be planted; abandoned gravel pits will be turned into small lakes; a million-gallon cistern will capture rainwater; and, with the threat of flooding eliminated, the use of local parks will increase fivefold, exults Bapna.

Lipkis is thrilled by the project's implications. "We've also developed a skill at facilitating integrated watershed management," he says, "bringing multiple diverse agencies and community groups together to collaborate and create holistic solutions." **—EG**