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## Plant lab takes root in Presidio's Fort Scott

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A new state-of-the-art seed and plant lab opened Wednesday as the new home for the workers and volunteers pushing to return the Presidio's landscape to a vision of California's past.

The lab at Fort Scott includes an area for cleaning, sorting, drying and storing the native seeds and spores brought in by the nursery's collecting crew, as well as an adjoining propagation lab where the seeds can be planted and started before they're moved to the greenhouse.

The new lab and its adjoining greenhouse replace the huge, battered World War II-era metal warehouse that housed the Presidio's nursery center until it was condemned and demolished last year.

"Now we have a wonderful space instead of a picnic table to do our work," said Betty Young, the nursery program director for Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy.

There's a lot of work to be done. Last year alone, the nursery grew 74,000 plants from 161 native species, with all of them slated for use in landscaping projects throughout the Presidio.

Many of the plant species have never been grown in a nursery environment, so it's been a learning experience, Young admitted.

"We're trying to duplicate the entire palette of plants that were native here," she said. "We were able to dream the dream of a perfect place to work, and now it's a reality."

Finding the seeds and spores used in the lab is a bit of a treasure hunt, given the number of nonnative plants that have taken over much of the Presidio since the Spanish explorers first arrived at San Francisco Bay.

Michele Laskowski and a pair of interns are the seed hunters for the lab, wandering through the Presidio in search of native plants and keeping precise records of their findings.



"We collect from patches of vegetation that have never been cleared and even from busy spots like road medians, wherever the plants are found," Laskowski said.

The 1,040-square-foot lab is a multicolored wooden building designed for energy efficiency.

That ultragreen construction is an important part of the plans for that part of the park. The lab and its adjoining, not-quite-finished greenhouse are the first parts of a planned Presidio Stewardship and Sustainability Center, a joint project of the Presidio Trust, the conservancy and the National Park Service.

The goal is to bring together the various offices working to restore the park and its historical buildings into one spot, with the nursery and its surrounding grounds as a centerpiece, said Michael Boland, chief planning officer for the trust.

Besides the lab and greenhouses, the plan calls for the conversion of a historic building overlooking the nursery into space for offices and the volunteers who work at the park. There also will be an education center for the thousands of schoolchildren who visit the nursery each year and a landscaped area designed to showcase sustainable development.

"We have quite a ways to go, but this is a key piece," Boland said.

The \$500,000 cost of the lab, greenhouse and site preparation was covered by contributions from FedEx, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the S.D. Bechtel Jr. Foundation.

But the rest of the \$8 million cost for the sustainability center has to be raised before the project can move forward, said Greg Moore, executive director of the conservancy.

With projects like the Doyle Drive reconstruction ripping up chunks of the Presidio's grounds, there's going to be a need for plenty of landscape work in the coming years, which is one reason the seed and plant lab was at the head of the project list, he said.

"These are going to be functional facilities from the moment they open," Moore said. "And we need the plants."

### **Volunteers sought for bay area parks conservancy**

The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy operates five native plant nurseries in San Francisco and Marin County and all are looking for volunteers for their weekly drop-in programs. Volunteers work in the nursery, remove invasive species, collect seeds and do garden work. Details are available by visiting the conservancy's Web site, [www.parksconservancy.org](http://www.parksconservancy.org), and clicking "Native Plant Nurseries."

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