

Mt. Helix Park's Magazine

FROM THE TOP

ISSUE 19 SPRING - SUMMER 2022



MT. HELIX PARK
FOUNDATION

*Dedicated to Preserving
Mt. Helix Nature Theatre and Park*

**THE FIGHT
TO SAVE
THE CROSS**

**XERCES
Butterfly Project**

**Mt. Helix
Food & Wine
Festival
TICKETS ON SALE**

**Birdwatching Peaks
with Migration**

**BOARD Changes
for 2022**

PARK HOURS
VISIT THE PARK WEBSITE FOR UPDATES REGARDING PARK HOURS

NATURE | EVENTS | LOCAL HISTORY | PEOPLE | PRESERVATION

REMAINING 2022 EVENTS

Please continue to check back as events may change.

JUNE 10, JULY 8, AUG 12, SEP 9, OCT 28 -

CANDLELIGHT CONCERT SERIES

JUNE 25 - FAMILY NATURE DAY

JULY 9 - SUNSET SOIREE MEMBER THANK YOU EVENING

AUG 20 - FOOD & WINE FESTIVAL FUNDRAISER

SEP 3 - MEMBER ASTRONOMY NIGHT

WITH SAN DIEGO ASTRONOMY ASSOCIATION

DEC 10 - CAROLING ON MT. HELIX

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Email: Volunteer@MtHelixPark.org

Mt. Helix Park does not receive government funding.

Your membership, donations, and volunteer service ensure the one-of-a-kind historic Park, monument, and nature preserve remain an asset to the community.

Your support provides a free place for families to make memories, new friendships to be formed, community programming, and pollinators to thrive in the restored native habitat.

From the bottom of my heart, THANK YOU!

Krista Powers, Executive Director

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MT. HELIX PARK

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Krista Powers

EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR

From the Executive Director

Welcome Back!

There is much to do in '22, and we hope you enjoy this issue of our member magazine filled with updates.

If you have been through the Park this year, you may have noticed a diverse flurry of activities. Not only are we returning to events and special member-only evenings, but in preparation for the Park's 100th year anniversary in 2025, we have embarked on critical restoration projects. We are in the midst of a defining moment in history and raising the funds to cover the costs has become a critical piece of the equation.

While many of these major pieces like the Cross work, electrical upgrades, and collapsing rock wall repair must be performed by professionals, it is important to recognize we also need the help of those volunteers who give of their time and talents out of their love for the Park. This, in turn, helps us save donor dollars.

This year Gary Severt and Charles Turkle prepped the entire Yawkey Trail for the restoration efforts. For about two

weeks, Gary used donated rental machinery, grading and removing unwanted material at both the trail site as well as on Sunrise Point and throughout the Park. John Mead, as project manager for the trail project, spent hours in planning and then teaching the trail captains how to build steps from railroad ties, design and prepare ditches to deter erosion, and to add rock to better define the path. The captains then shared this knowledge with their volunteer workforce. The habitat team members have worked tirelessly this past year removing invasive non-native species and planting a variety of native plants which support pollinators, contributing to a sustainable future for humans and wildlife alike. New Habitat team member, Deborah Austin, has not only transformed the habitat area she adopted, but is also chairing our first ever Nature Day Festival on June 25th. Additionally, with their committee members, our super-talented Food & Wine Festival planning teams led by event Chair Susan Schalin, Vice Chair Jeremiah Schultz, Auction Chair Kimberly Bardin, and Food & Beverage Chair Chris Kilrain are working hard to provide an incredible experience on August 20th.

Continued on page 15



Wes Troy

PRESIDENT
Mt. Helix Park
Foundation

From the Foundation President

Well, Spring has sprung! Actually, we might have leaped right over it with this recent warm weather. Not complaining, it's one of the reasons we all love it here in Southern California. With it comes the budding flowers and trees, new generations of birds and critters, and the hope for an exciting Summer.

As the season changes, so do things at our wonderful Park! I was overjoyed and extremely thankful for the recent opportunity to become President of the Mt. Helix Park Foundation. I am excited to help continue the amazing work that this Board, its volunteers, and the local community have done over the decades in making this Park a true blessing for all who visit.

I would personally like to thank Norm Hapke for his devotion to the Park as President over the last four years. It has not been an easy tenure by any means. Norm was skillful in navigating an epidemic crisis not seen in one hundred years, balancing the needs of the Park, the staff and the community that needed it desperately. Behind the scenes Norm

was ever generous in his donations to the Park. Norm personally brought in Development Consultants and Non-Profit Business coaches to continue the education and strengthening of our staff, team members and volunteers. Norm fostered an environment of collaboration, learning and teamwork while always making it fun with his creative and quick wit. Norm has truly been a mentor to all of us, and I personally look forward to much more of it. The Foundation and the Park are stronger than ever because of his commitment and service.

Much like the bees in Spring we, too, have been busy. Major improvement projects are well underway. From the Cross at the top, to the trails, to the electrical upgrades, new Park storage, and to the numerous habitat areas, we are frantically working to provide everyone with a beautiful and safe place to rest, reflect, recharge, and rejuvenate.

I look forward to seeing you all at the Park this summer at any of the great events we have planned including, to name a few, the Family Nature Day, Candlelight Music events and, of course, our Food and Wine Festival in August.

A reminder that summers can get busy fast; remember to make time for yourself and your

Continued on page 15

The Fight to Save the Cross

by Peggy Junker

The battle to save Mt. Helix Park's Cross is one of East County's great history lessons. The cast of characters, the plot, overcoming adversity and the reverberating effect on the community are all embedded in the region's heritage.

Local families include Park experiences in their traditions and its reputation as a point of interest has spread beyond County borders with the help of social media, YouTube and television. It is worth remembering, however, the decade-long legal fight, resolved by the formation of the Mt. Helix Park Foundation and its assumption of stewardship, that would ultimately preserve it as intended as a memorial to Mary Carpenter Yawkey and a place "to promote knowledge and culture, to relieve the distressed in body, mind and spirit, to cultivate a love for beauty in art and nature, to foster an interest in the love of music and elevate and refine mankind."

The story of the struggle began in 1929 when the Park was gifted to the County of San Diego by the founding Yawkey family. A gesture that would inadvertently lead to the 1987 lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) that called for the removal of the 35-foot Cross declaring its existence on government funded land violated the U.S. Constitution's "no-preference clause" as it applies to religious impartiality.

The lawsuit and the fight to preserve the Cross were catapulted into the public eye in 1989 when 12-year-old Sean Carroll of El Cajon wrote an article for the International History Fair resulting in the Park's Historical Landmark status. Carroll's report drew on an interview with Colonel Ed Fletcher whose family owned the land prior to the Yawkeys and who, at the age of 19, served as foreman for the construction of the 1,600 seat Nature Theatre. He included as well exhibits with articles about the ongoing legal battles.

In 1991 a permanent injunction issued by U.S. District Judge Gordon Thompson Jr., ruled that the Mt. Helix and Mt. Soledad crosses must be torn down by March 3, a date that was later extended by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. To protect the Mt. Helix Cross, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to transfer ownership of the Cross and the 15-foot parcel of land around it to the San Diego Historical Society—a measure the court invalidated.

By the late 90's all appeals were exhausted and public outcries and protests to save the Cross began anew in an effort to stave off its destruction.

Help arrived in the form of Bob Ball and Mark Allan, two local community leaders who formed the "Foundation for the Preservation of Mount Helix Nature Theatre," later known as the Mt. Helix Park Foundation.



Left to right, Bob Ball, Dianne Jacob, Laurie Orange, and Mark Allan

Ball and Allan, then members of the Grossmont Mt. Helix Improvement Association (GMIA), said they were moved by the threat to a community icon and resigned their posts on the GMIA board of directors to dedicate themselves to finding a solution.

Ball, a local attorney, along with then County Supervisor Dianne Jacob, and Deputy County Counsel Ian Fan and his successor, Laurie Orange, worked together to find a viable solution. It was determined that the formation of a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation to which the Park could be transferred was the best approach. In 1999 Ball and Allan assembled a 7-person board consisting of Ball, Allan, Penny Halgren, John Mead, Al Platt, Sheryll Russell and Bob Cederdahl, with Ball serving as President.

Later that year the County, with Orange as counsel, filed the petition to transfer the Park to the Foundation.

Ball, on behalf of the Foundation, accepted the transfer to become the Successor Trustee of the Park, thus placing the Park and its Cross back into private control and ending the lawsuit.

"The lawsuit concerned me deeply," recalls Jacob who grew up in East County, going to the Park. "Being the County Supervisor I was able to work closely with County Counsel in fighting the lawsuit, so we did."

See CROSS on page 15



Mt. Helix Park Foundation Board Updates

by Peggy Junker

The Park board of directors is well positioned to meet the challenges of preserving and maintaining this 97-year-old historic Nature Park.

After a successful four years as president, Norm Hapke will be succeeded by Wes Troy as board chairman. Wes is the general manager of La Mesa Lumber. He has served on the board since October 2020, bringing with him a well-regarded business acumen and a long-time connection to the community. Hapke will remain on the board and continue to serve on the development, finance and facilities committees.

Other changes include the election of Jeremiah Shultz as VP of

Operations, following the resignation of Helgi Gudmundson, who will continue to serve on the habitat and finance committees; Yvonne Goff will step in as secretary. In addition, the board said farewell to Celina Laframboise, who stepped down to complete her MBA in Sustainability and Environmental Compliance and to focus on her new position as Senior Program Analyst at the San Diego Housing Commission. Laframboise continues to volunteer at the Park along with her mother, Christine, and the entire Laframboise family.

Caroline Harrod will continue to serve as VP of Development and Chris Kilrain as CFO. ■



Wes Troy



Jeremiah Schulz



Yvonne Goff



Caroline Herrod



Chris Kilrain

Park Restoration Updates

KIOSK: Two picnic tables, a kiosk and garden area adjacent to the amphitheater and parking lot are a favorite spot for Park visitors. The Park's Habitat Restoration Group Committee has been overseeing a transition of the space in recent weeks as volunteers replace exotic plants with those native to the area. Recently added are: Cleveland sage (*Salvia clevelandii*), San Diego Sunflower (*Bahiopsis laciniata* (Viguiera), California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), San Diego sagewort (*Artemisia paleri*), St. Catherine's lace, *Eriogonum giganteum*, orange bush monkey flower (*Mimulus aurantiacus*), all from Native West Nursery, as well as California sunflower (*Helianthus Californicus*) donated by Helix Environmental Planning.



ROCK WALL: Preliminary plans are underway to repair a collapsing section of the rock wall that lines the road to the Cross. Coordinating the project on behalf of the Facilities Committee is Civil Engineer Carleen Grantham. Grantham says the Board would like to see the almost century-old wall repaired and brought up to current code standards. She said they are currently engaging an engineering team to address the rock wall and adjacent areas including the road to the Cross and parking areas.



GATES: In March all the Park gates were repaired and repainted by the locally owned family business, King of Painters, giving the entrance and exit gates along with several gates and posts within the Park some much needed TLC. King of Painters, who previously painted the gates in 2008 when they were first installed, hand-prepped, sanded and painted each a uniform shade of brown. Project lead and board member Caroline Harrod, along with the board, are excited to see the much-needed restoration and painting happening throughout the Park.



CROSS: The lights continued to come on each night during the Cross-restoration project that began in September. Repairs to the 35-foot cross and foundation are now complete, and the final brilliant white coat will be added to seal and protect the iconic structure, according to Park board member and project lead Bob Ball, who says he expects the project to wrap up in June. Additional upgrades include new electrical boxes and electrical lines to the Cross, water lines, sprinklers, new planting areas with new plants and shrubs, as well as repairs to and repainting of the fencing surrounding the Cross.



The Yawkey Trail Gets A Much Needed Upgrade

“...to relieve the distressed in body, mind and spirit, to cultivate a love for beauty in art and nature...”

-YAWKEY FAMILY 1929

by John D. Mead

These words are a piece of the mandate and vision that the creators of the Mt. Helix Park & Nature Theatre gave the Trustees nearly 90 years ago. Ten years ago, over 30 volunteers carefully carved out a ¼ mile trail on the western side of the Park from the densely vegetated and rocky hillside. As wonderful as the “Nature Park” atop Mt. Helix had been for 80 years, I’m delighted to say that by providing a place to hike within the Park and off its beaten paths, we took a sizeable step in furthering the original Yawkey Family intentions with their namesake trail.

Over the course of the last handful of years, the Habitat Restoration Group members have done a remarkable job of restoring and improving the natural vegetation along the trail. But, even a dirt path itself with heavy use and weather will deteriorate without periodic care. So this past February, and then again on the last day of April, volunteers with shovels and picks, and hammers and wheelbarrows, gathered once again to make some much needed improvements. We used 35 railroad ties and tons of rock to install steps and line the trail to help with erosion control and to better define the pathway. In the process we made the trail safer, wider and a bit easier to run, hike or saunter along.

We want to give special thanks to the Park Foundation, to the many hard-working volunteers including our friends from *Pathway Ministries*, and to the following businesses who generously donated expensive equipment and materials, as well as their time:

- **Adventure 16** – donated rebar and additional railroad ties
- **Bob and Kimberly Bardin** – donated and delivered repurposed railroad ties
- **La Mesa Lumber** – donated railroad ties
- **Pathways Church** – provided BobCat skid steer loader
- **Spencer Mead Snakes** – provided truck and trailer, a mini-excavator and a generator





Photos by Barbara Wise

Black-throated Gray Warbler



Townsend's Warbler

Feeding Frenzy Makes for Record Birdwatching at Mt. Helix Park

by Peggy Junker

Early each morning, for several weeks this spring, a cluster of birdwatchers gathered daily outside the Park office to witness a newly discovered avian hotspot. Armed with notepads, binoculars, cameras, specialized lenses, and a lot of patience, the eager were not disappointed.

According to data from eBird.org, over 90 bird species have been recorded at the Park. About 25 species native to our local coastal sage scrub and chaparral plant communities, such as House Finch, Lesser Goldfinch, Wrentit, California Towhee, and Anna's Hummingbird, are year-round residents. Other year-round crowd-pleasers are raptors, including Red-tailed, Red-shouldered and Cooper's Hawks. Spring and fall, however, bring waves of migratory birds who travel south for the winter and return north to breed during the warmer months.

Local birder Eitan Altman, who frequents the Park to search for rare birds, says he first noticed a major surge in activity on April 22. On that morning, the upper reaches of Mt. Helix were swarming with migratory birds, with some particularly active trees hosting 50+ individuals. He explains this phenomenon, known as a "fallout," occurs "when a large group of migratory birds comes down en masse. Sometimes it's to refuel at a usual migratory stop-off, which Mt. Helix Park is, but these large fallouts are usually due

to adverse weather conditions that knock the migrants down. When they see there is ample food and shelter available, they decide to stick around." The recent wave has been mostly comprised of Wilson's, Townsend's, Orange-crowned, and Hermit Warblers, along with numerous Western Tanagers, Black-headed Grosbeaks and Hooded Orioles. Some less common migrant sightings include Olive-sided Flycatchers, MacGillivray's Warblers, Swainson's Thrushes, and Acorn Woodpeckers.

After Altman reported this fallout to local birding groups and on eBird, a popular website used to log bird sightings, a number of Parkgoers followed his lead and came to watch the bump in activity. Altman says that the spot is a particularly attractive stop-over for birds due to the combination of extensive native vegetation and a massive supply of "lerps"—a waxy, white cocoon-like coating that covers an immature psyllid (jumping plant lice). This Australian insect, which is specific to the non-native eucalyptus, has become a favorite snack for a number of local songbirds.

While Altman suggests that the eucalyptus and

the lerps are largely responsible for the unusual duration and concentration of this influx, he says the ongoing restoration efforts by the Park's Habitat Restoration Group, coupled with a community-wide transition to California native plants, would likely bring a similar result with a healthier overall habitat. "The net effect would likely be a greater diversity of native birds, both residents and migrants," he explains, adding, "while you might not see the massive concentrations in a few individual trees, native plants attract native insects and pollinators, providing both habitat and a critical food source that would bring the migrant birds as well." ■



Park's Annual Food & Wine Festival Back in Full Swing

by Peggy Junker

Tickets for Mt. Helix Park's 15th annual Food & Wine Festival go on sale June 1st. This year's festivities are returning to a full-scale production, and you are invited to "party with a purpose," surrounded by spectacular 360-degree views, while supporting one of San Diego's most beautiful historic places.

The sunset at 1,400 feet never disappoints and provides a stunning backdrop as you experience San Diego's best restaurants, beverage companies and artists. Then, dance under the stars to music by well-known Beach Boys cover band, Surfs Up. The Responders will kick off the evening on the main stage, and local favorite, Surf Birdz, will keep the area at the summit rockin'.

Ticket prices start at just \$65 and increase July 1st. Buy now and save. Become a member of the Park for as little as \$35 and save even more!

Vendors are elated to return to this traditional event after two years of virtual and scaled-down versions. Returning vendors include Helix Brewing Company, Trevi Hills Winery, San Pasqual Winery, Skrewball Whiskey, St. Petersburg Vodka, Liberty Call Distilling, Brigantine, Hooleys, The Hills, D'Amatos, Terra Catering, Dream Dinners and Brew Spot Coffee. New this year is Mike Hess Brewing, and we will be adding even more businesses to this list.

Check the Park's website to purchase tickets, for ongoing updates, and details at mthelixpark.org. If you want to be a

part of the Food & Wine Festival, here are three great ways to contribute:

- Become a Sponsor or purchase tickets.
- Donate a Silent Auction item, experience, or gift card.
- Make a donation to the event if you are unable to attend.

Let us know if you have any questions by contacting the Mt. Helix Park office at 619.741.4363. Or, you may reach out to Krista Powers, Mt. Helix Park Foundation Executive Director, by calling or texting 619.985.1445 or emailing Krista at K Powers@MtHelixPark.org.

We look forward to celebrating with you on Saturday, August 20, 2022! ■





MT. HELIX FOOD & WINE FESTIVAL

MtHelixPark.org

**AUG
20**

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Includes:

- Unlimited Food & Beverage Sampling 5:30 - 7:30 pm. Cash bar 7:30 - 10 pm.
- Free parking and shuttle from Grossmont High School lot.
- Unreserved seating

\$65 MEMBERS
\$75 NON-MEMBERS
Prices go up July 15

VIP ADMISSION

Includes:

- Unlimited Food & Beverage Sampling 5:30 - 7:30 pm.
- 2 additional drink tickets per admission.
- Free parking and shuttle from Fire Station VIP parking.
- VIP Box Seating.
- Gift Bag

\$125 MEMBERS
\$150 NON-MEMBERS
Prices go up July 15

VIP TABLE SEATING

- Includes: Unlimited Food & Beverage Sampling 5:30 - 7:30 pm.
- 2 additional drink tickets admission.
- Free parking and shuttle from Fire Station VIP parking.
- Reserved Seat at VIP table.
- Gift Bag
- Wine at Table

\$250 MEMBERS
\$2,500 Table of 10
Prices go up July 15

MEMBERSHIPS START AT JUST \$35/YR PER HOUSEHOLD

"It is expressly required and directed that annually, on each and every Easter Sunday forever, religious services of strictly non-sectarian character and appropriate and suitable for commemorating the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, as taught by the Christian Churches of the world, shall be held at Sunrise at said Mount Helix Nature Theatre, which exercises shall be open to the people of all creeds, religions, and nation."

— YAWKEY TRUST FOR MT. HELIX PARK

Easter Sunrise Service 2022

by Peggy Junker

After two years of virtual-only Easter sunrise services, Mt. Helix Park's historic amphitheater was once again filled with voices raised in prayer and song. An estimated 1,500 people gathered to celebrate the 105th Easter Sunrise Service at Mt. Helix Park on April 17, conducted, both live and virtually, by Summit Church.

The nine-piece Summit Church worship band kicked off the morning with a powerful live performance followed by a welcome message from Mt. Helix Park Executive Director Krista Powers. QR code links were provided to direct guests to a website where they could request prayers and help Ukrainian refugees.

Pastor Bruce Grecco spoke about the message of Easter.

"It's all about hope," he said, adding that no matter what your religious experience has been or what your background is, Easter is a great opportunity to reconnect with the hope of Jesus and reconsider what that means for your life.

"You could call this a comeback Easter," Grecco suggested, "because it's been two years since we've been able to do this, and here. We are back. Which is exactly what Easter is about. It's about 'comeback.'" Keeping it fun and relevant, he listed a series of examples from popular culture depicting great



comeback moments and ending with the greatest comeback in the history of humanity, "Jesus's resurrection from the dead."

He spoke of a cultural shift in the past 20 years that created a "new narrative of distrust, of disbelief," with regard to the story of Easter and the teachings of the Bible. Offering proof and documentation of the life, death and resurrection of Christ, Grecco referenced the writings of Apostle Paul, a contemporary of Jesus, acknowledged by historians and biblical scholars alike who spoke about, among other things, Christ dying for the sins of Mankind, and the story of Thomas, who

witnessed Jesus after his resurrection.

Grecco likened the resurrection to the restoration of hope and belief saying that "because Jesus came back from the dead, you can come back from hopelessness," adding that "hope" is the antidote for the troubled world we are experiencing today.

The event closed with Grecco inviting the crowd to participate in the adornment of a cross. Buckets of tulips, roses, sunflowers and mums were provided so worshipers could place a flower to signify their belief in "a comeback."

A recording of the entire event can be found on the Mt. Helix Park website: MthelixPark.org. ■



Good Friday Celebrations served as precursors to the Park's annual Easter Sunrise Service this year. University Christian Church held an intimate event by the Cross in the morning followed by a large-scale production hosted by Faith Chapel. Faith Chapel organizers created an energetic evening with live music featuring a line-up that included some of the top music artists in worship.



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HABITAT HABITAT HABITAT

Xerces Pollinator Habitat Project

It's not either/or, it's AND

by Deborah Austin

I made my way to the Mt. Helix Park's Habitat Restoration Group (HRG) Committee last November through a divine series of events. Last spring a friend got me involved with a Pollinator/Habitat project through the Xerces Society, an international non-profit organization that protects the natural world through the conservation of invertebrates and their habitats.

By late October I picked up a Xerces planting kit containing 96 native pollinator plants. It turned out that these small plants would mature to cover approximately 360 sq. ft. of planting area. This was too big for the original intended garden to accommodate. I knew there had to be another group or organization I could find to work with me on this endeavor and then I remembered meeting Krista Powers, Executive Director for the Mt. Helix Park Foundation in October at a California Native Plant Society event. I was certain the Park would be the perfect fit for these plants. Hopeful, I asked the HRG if I could plant them and they said "yes!"

I showed up for the November Habitat Restoration work party with my 96 tiny plants and met a team of volunteers ready to assist me. We spent most of the time clearing out dead and invasive plants. I think I only got about 10 plants planted that day (only 86 more to go!). I loaded up the trays of unplanted plants and told Krista that I wasn't done planting but I would see the project through. Krista said she was secretly hoping I would sign up for the Adopt-A-Habitat program, and I did!

This project is a labor of love for me. I'm a certified QWEL (Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper) landscape designer committed to using my skills to promote water efficient gardens that are organically maintained. I don't think people realize that native plants are the epitome of organic gardening. They don't require any soil amendments, not even compost. In fact, it can actually kill them.

Did I mention that the habitat I adopted is right below the cross? I felt honored to

have been assigned stewardship for such a visible space and I felt a sense of responsibility to create something spectacular, for, you, the public, to see someday. I say "someday" because I wasn't certain I would live to see these 2-inch plants bloom.

To my amazement, some of those plants are as big as small shrubs now and, yes, they are blooming in just 5 months! I chat with a lot of curious people who walk by as I'm caring for my area. It's fun to share with them about the Park's habitat restoration work, the Xerces efforts to help bring back the Monarchs and other pollinators and the benefits of planting native plants. What I hope to convey with my area is that you don't have to sacrifice beauty to be a good steward with our environment. You can have both; it's not either/or, it's and. ■



Encelia californica (Coast sunflower)



Eriogonum fasciculatum (Buckwheat)



Archostaphylos densiflora 'McMinn' (McMinn Manzanita)



Mimulus aurantiacus (Bush monkeyflower)



Asclepias fascicularis (Narrow leaf milkweed)



Penstemon pseudospectabilis (Desert penstemon)



Monardella linoides (Willow leaf monardella)



Eschscholzia californica 'Mahogany Red' (California poppy)



Mimulus aurantiacus (Bush monkeyflower)

Mt Helix Park Habitat Volunteers Recognized on Recent Garden Tour

by Peggy Junker

Since removing their “thirsty” lawn and landscaping with California native plants in 2009, Charles and Patti Turkle say they have seen an uptick in the variety of birds and insects on their property. That was the goal when the duo converted their quarter-acre yard in the foothills of Mt. Helix, a move that landed them a spot on the California Native Plant Society’s (CNPS) 8th annual garden tour this spring, and showcased their ability to cultivate a space that is both beautiful and ecologically beneficial.

Their initial move towards drought tolerant plants won them an award at the 2004 Helix Water District’s WaterSmart Landscape Contest ceremony where they met Linda Whitney, a California native landscape designer, who invited them to see her inspirational property. Then in 2019 at a CNPS meeting they heard from one of the organization’s representatives, Judy Lincer, that new gardens were needed to be featured on their upcoming tour. Wanting to participate, they worked with Lincer to adjust plantings and meet the 70% native species quota necessary to qualify. The result, theirs was one of 14 spaces, including Mt. Helix Park, featured on the April 9, 2022 tour showcasing East County gardens; a display of exemplary spaces that debunk the myth that indigenous Southern California gardens are brown and sparse.

The couple’s design features swaths of greenery that explode with color during the blooming season along with a mature California Live oak. Entering the front yard guests are greeted by a sage-lined path dotted with purple blooms of Bee’s Bliss. Veering to the right, the path wraps around to a side-yard where the Bee’s Bliss transitions to redflower and Santa Cruz Island buckwheat (*Eriogonum grande* var. *rubescens* and *Eriogonum arborescens*, respectively). A charming archway marks the entry to the back yard and is flanked by a variety of Clarkia, minor’s

lettuce (*Claytonia perfoliata*), and several varieties of salvia opening to an island of Deer Grass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*), framed by a Desert Maple (*Acer negundo*), a Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) and a Palo Verde.

The Turkle’s space shows how spectacular and well thought-out a homespun landscape can be. Patti, who has a degree in biology and Charles, who served for many years as a bio-engineer technician, have put their respective talents together to create a plan that is easy to maintain, drought tolerant and worthy of the focus the CNPS has given it.

“We use less water each year as the plants mature and put down deep roots,” say the Turkles pointing out the practicality of using native plants. “We also don’t use any pesticides or fertilizers because the native plants are so well adapted to thrive here.”

In 2021 the team signed on as Mt. Helix Park habitat volunteers and have brought their skills to the Park, adopting and transforming a habitat in record time. Their desire to contribute to the restoration of native plants has fueled the Park’s program and added to its resources. ■





FUN FOR FAMILIES

Re-wilding your yard



by Krista Powers

We are learning more and more about the health benefits, of working in the yard, to humans and wildlife. We also know it can be a fun activity for kids. Whether it's seeing the look on grandkids' faces as they discover the joy of dirt for the first time or hanging with your teenagers learning environmental science and how we can be better stewards of nature, your yard is a wonderful place to make memories.

Summer is a great time to kick-start the rewilding of your yard, setting it up for a springtime of visits from pollinators and migrating birds. Transitioning your yard to native plants will not only save money and water, but it will provide a year-round flurry of wildlife activities to enjoy. Stopping the use of pesticides, poisons, and herbicides means that caterpillars and all the tiny little insects will be able to each play their roles in the ecosystem around your home. It means that the songbirds eating those insects are safe and the birds of prey eating those that scurry about will not be poisoned. It is amazing to watch nature balance itself when humans get out of the way.

In our family's journey to re-wild our own yard, we have found wonderful learning experiences. We recently learned about the potato bug, roly-poly, doodlebug, *Armadillidium vulgare*, or whatever your family chooses to call them, and their role in removing heavy metals from the soil. Just another amazing critter living within the soil, cleaning and processing it for the benefit of life. We are using vinegar in a battle to eradicate nonnatives section by section and learning as we go. We know this is a marathon, not a sprint, but as we clear a few areas this summer, making room for the fall planting of native plants, we are learning and making memories while trying to do our part to make this a healthier world for everyone.

Interested in learning more? Pop by the Park on the first Saturday morning of each month and join us in the dirt with Native Plant experts. All ages welcome.

Two AMAZING resources for us locally:

California Native Plant Society – San Diego Chapter

Calscape.org – Just type in your address and Calscape will recommend plants, tell you about them including what pollinators they support, and where to find them locally.

Summer Activities for bringing life to your yard:

- Select a section, turn off the water, and start removing non-native plants. Vinegar in various percentages helps and just be comfortable that non-native eradication can take a few years as the seeds deep in the soil pop up. Enjoy learning about the bugs along the journey and the different types of soil. Burn some calories and take in the fruits of your hard

work as the progress unfolds.

- Enjoy perusing the Calscape website and the plants that pop to you. Know that it's best to order several because it seems to be that even when you plant the same plants next to each other, care for them in the same manner, at no fault of yours, one will live and one will die. It's just a part of life, but there will be satisfaction as you watch the marvels of native plants green through the winter moisture and the spring life they attract. They will save your water bill as many go dormant in the summer but some will stay evergreen without a hit to your family budget.
- November, give or take a few weeks, is a sweet spot for planting natives.

Other tips:

- Leave the leaves | The leaves are an important habitat for many beneficial insects. They also keep moisture in the ground and fertilize the soil. Nature's mulch.
- Watch for intruders | Continue to remove non-native plants which often outcompete native flora and support less wildlife.
- Turn off outdoor lights or switch to yellow LEDs which are less deadly to insects and less blinding to nocturnal animals.
- Add fun feeding and water stations in your yard or little homes for the bees that live solo.

Of course, there are many more fun tips to Save the Pollinators, but the most important thing we can do now is create pollinator pathways from yard to yard, mountain to mountain, as we support the over 600 species of bees and over 100 species of butterflies in San Diego county.

As your yard comes alive, sit back and enjoy the show. ■



Restoration Landscaping

The shovel scrapes
 The workmen chatter
 They know not what they conjure
 With their rending
 The soil
 The scent
 Of fresh dug
 Detritus
 Of acorns and fungi,
 Lichens and leaves
 Diatomaceous glitter
 Pixie dust

My tiny fingers
 Once dug in here
 When I had no knowledge
 Of any other
 I played
 in the sparse shade
 At the peak,
 hard won in scorching sun,
 Child's back
 to the panoramic view
 Watching ants
 Forming hills
 and moving in lines
 In umami soil
 Which collected
 In the toenails
 Of my small bare feet

My hands, spotted and wrinkled,
 Swipe words into a screen
 In the sparse shade
 Of the same live oak
 Seeking words
 To describe
 The feast
 Of view

While
 landscapers
 deposit mounds
 of memories
 From wheelbarrows
 Beside me.

— Shiloh Schnabel
 2 March 2022

It's impossible for me to mention everyone by name, but my heart fills with gratitude every day for our wonderful volunteers and donors who ensure that Mt. Helix Park continues to be a special and unique place for both our community and visitors from around the world.

Yes, we certainly have much to do in '22! I hope that as a member of the Mt. Helix family you will visit often to take advantage of this incredible nature preserve and our many activities, continue to support us, and encourage others to become members and volunteers.

See you in the Park,

Krista ■

PRESIDENT from page 2

course, our Food and Wine Festival in August.

A reminder that summers can get busy fast; remember to make time for yourself and your family at Mt. Helix Park. I promise you it will be time well spent and cherished. ■

CROSS from page 3

Jacob's commitment to the cause and her fervor helped generate momentum. Assisting her was Orange who just came aboard when attorney Ian Fan took a leave of absence. She handled the close of litigation and the transfer of the Cross from the County to the Foundation. An opportunity she calls a "great introduction to the County."

Ball, who remains on the board, continues to be a passionate advocate for the Park and its Trust. Ball, along with Yawkey descendant Alice Smith and a cadre of dedicated directors, understand the significance of what they are preserving and continue to put hundreds of hours of volunteer time each year to preserve and maintain it.

"I think the effort that was extended by all parties was well worth it," remarks Ball. "It's a great resource as well as a great gift to the public."

Allan went on to serve as the board president after Ball and remains active with the Park. Jacob and Orange also remain involved with the Park as does Colonel Ed Fletcher descendant Eric Fletcher, who served for many years on the Foundation's board.

Bob Cederdahl continues to support the Park along with John Mead who recently managed the restoration of the ¼ mile Yawkey Trail and the construction of an informational kiosk. ■

Shiloh Schnabel is a 3rd generation San Diegan and a graduate of Grossmont High School, where his grandmother and mother also graduated. He currently lives in Minnesota but comes "home" to visit his family and inevitably makes his way to Mt. Helix Park. His son, a native Minnesotan, loves it as much as he does. One morning on a recent visit, Schnabel says the scent of the soil inspired him to write a poem.



MT. HELIX PARK FOUNDATION

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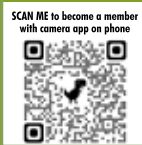
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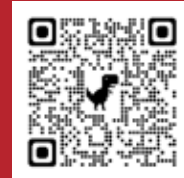
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