

Mt. Helix Park's Magazine

FROM THE TOP

ISSUE 17 SPRING - SUMMER 2021



MT. HELIX PARK
FOUNDATION

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

**EASTER SUNRISE
Service Broadcast
Livestream for the
Second Year**

**Volunteers Complete
KEY PROJECTS
for the Park**



**Volunteers
Promote
PLANT
PROPAGATION**

**THEATER
Returns
to the Park**

**Meet the Park's
Board of Directors**

PARK HOURS

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NATURE | EVENTS | LOCAL HISTORY | PEOPLE | PRESERVATION



Team Helix

MT. HELIX PARK VOLUNTEERS
HABITAT - EVENTS - LEADERSHIP



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Cover photo by Gary Severt: The Park remained a respite for the community during the COVID-19 crisis. Pictured here a local red-tailed hawk catches wind just off the southeast facing slope. Hovering sometimes for more than a minute at a time, these magnificent birds are one of the many wildlife who consider the Park home.

MT. HELIX PARK

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To contact the Editor call 619-741-4363 or email pjunker@mthelixpark.org. © Copyright 2021 Mt. Helix Park

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Krista Powers

EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR

From the
Executive
Director

The Heartbeat of the Park

Over the past year we faced many challenges. Through them all, like super heroes, were the amazing men, women, and families who showed up, some for the first time, ready to roll up their sleeves to help with whatever project the Park needed.

While my heart fills every time I see a volunteer in the Park, I admit one of my favorite days occurs on the first Saturday of each month when volunteers gather in the Park from 9 a.m. to noon. They arrive with their gloves, tools, water, and sunblock in hand, ready to tackle projects which vary from weed eradication to minor construction. Families, individuals new to the area, service groups like the Lions Club of La Mesa, volunteers from Just Serve, all work together and have fun.

In my lifetime, I have volunteered many hours to worthwhile organizations such as SPRITES mother-daughter charity of East County and the Holiday Bowl Red Coats where I still serve. I can say without

reservation that these Team Helix volunteers are the nicest team-oriented group of people I have ever met.

Our volunteers, the heartbeat of this Park, don't just come on Saturday mornings. Others spend tireless hours doing everything from graffiti removal, to weed abatement, to helping with larger construction projects, and events in the Park. As one of our longest serving volunteers, past chair of the annual fundraiser, and co-founder of the garden party (now Habitat Committee), Diane McCann has remarked, "Many hands make light work." As a result, I frequently hear her voice in my head referring to that proverb. Gary Severt, another long-time volunteer, who always seems to pop up when we need him, is in the Park almost every morning and some evenings, working on various areas of the habitat. He recently removed two giant invasive pepper tree stumps and is sharing his incredible wealth of knowledge with us regarding construction and county ordinances for our work with GMIA and concerned citizens to make Mount Helix Drive safer. Rena Mulvey and Kathy Dean are the fearless graffiti removing goddesses. Ed Suhay, a master electrician, has saved us on several

See KRISTA on page 12

Opening Up

We are coming to the end of a uniquely traumatic year for the world, the nation, and our city. It has been a year that has been most deadly to one of our vulnerable populations as well as being deadly for much of the rest of the population.

It has been very difficult for our country's leaders and responsible scientists to choose a path forward to mitigate this pandemic. It is therefore understandable that governments have erred on the side of caution in deciding how to handle this unforeseen catastrophe. But...

All this is predicate to saying, "Yippee, we're almost out of the woods." That's the good news plus the fact that our pharmaceutical companies backed up by the resources and light hand of government have produced a miracle, an amazingly effective drug in record time with vanishingly small side effects.

That means to all who read this that we at Mt. Helix Park are more than ready for you to come visit us. We are open and beautiful and restful and a great place to bring your children and families. We are outdoors and you all know what that means: IT'S SAFE!

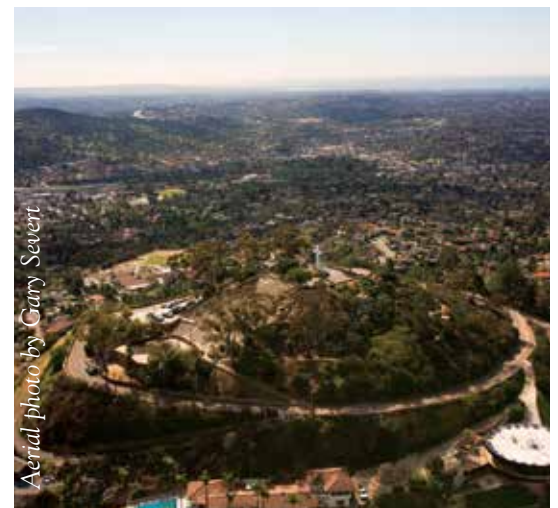
We welcome you with open arms and glad hearts. ■



Norm Hapke

PRESIDENT
Mt. Helix Park
Foundation

From the
Foundation
President



Aerial photo by Gary Severt

From Seed to Soil: Volunteers Propagate Plants for the Park

by Peggy Junker

Propagating plants (creating more plants from one single plant) seems like a daunting task best left to nurseries and professionals, but Jean Coffey doesn't see it that way. She and her husband, Allen, both habitat volunteers for the Park since 2014, are proof that with a little research and determination, anyone can do it.

"I don't find it intimidating," Jean says. "If it works, it works, if it doesn't, it doesn't," she shrugs. Her casual approach may be the cornerstone to her success.

Otay Water District incentives inspired the couple to relandscape their Rancho San Diego home in 2011. The discovery of go-to California native landscape websites gave them the tools they needed to complete the transformation on their own and so began their relationship with California natives.

Taking one class and using primarily the Las Pilitas Nursery website (which uses a zip code to identify plants best suited for an area's rainfall and soil type), they began the conversion of their front yard by removing grass and palms and replacing them with Salvia Pozo Blue Grey Musk Sage, fuchsia (*Epilobium cana*), Deer Grass (*muhlenbergia rigens*), Desert Willow (*Chilopsis linearis*), Heart's Desire Mountain Lilac (*Ceanothus gloriosus*) and several varieties of manzanita: *Arctostaphylos*



Allen & Jeanne Coffey propagate California Natives for the Park



Hearts Desire Mountain Lilac
(*Ceanothus gloriosus*)



California native fuchsia
(*Epilobium canum*)

densiflora, *Arctostaphylos* Sunset Manzanita, *Arctostaphylos* Baby Bear Manzanita Bush and *Arctostaphylos densiflora* Harmony Manzanita.

Not long after establishing their landscape and seeing the spread of some of their most successful varieties, Jean began to play around with propagating new plants from varieties she planted in the backyard including sage, fuchsia, goldenrod, aster and yarrow. The yield proved successful, and in 2015, she and Allen began offering the new plants from their own garden to the Park. Thanks to the gardening-duo, the Park now has a crop of established varieties from which it can draw future plantings. Besides emphasizing that people should simply have fun with the process and not be afraid of some failure, Jean shares the following two pearls of wisdom: 1. Use gorilla hair mulch (aka shredded redwood bark) when you are putting plants in the ground. "That's one of the best decisions I ever made," she points out. While more expensive, gorilla hair is long-lasting, keeps the soil moist and the weeds out; 2. Start plants from seeds if you can. Seeds can be collected from flowers once they have wilted and dried. Jean likes to sprout them in dirt-filled egg cartons covered with a plastic bag. "I've had good success with California fuchsia. With or without my help, they will come up all over the yard," she assures. As for sages, she sprouts them in water until little white half-inch roots appear, then she puts them in pots with soil.

See COFFEE on page 15

YOU, Nature and Propagation

by Sebastian Revels

Growing native plants is one of the best ways you can cultivate a positive relationship between yourself and the natural world around you. It is a practice deeply embedded in the evolution of our species. It was essential to our survival to learn about the native plants around where we lived and how to care for them properly! Then, the abundance that resulted from this relationship could be shared amongst your community.

My writing is focused on this journey, as opposed to specific propagation techniques.

Why? Because most of these techniques or methods can be found online and achieved with simple materials, such as potting soil and perlite from Lowe's. And if you don't have land, don't despair. I know from experience you can grow native plants on an apartment windowsill or patio. Instead, I want to speak to the essence of propagation, as well as offer guidance for embarking on this journey of cultivating a positive relationship with the world around us.

One of life's hallmarks is the ability to pass



Sebastian Revels

See SEBASTIAN on page 15



Rasma Rotsart, Eagle Scout

Kiosk Project Results in Area's First Female Eagle Scout

by Peggy Junker

15-year-old Rasma Rotsart hoped to join the ranks of her brothers who both completed their Eagle Scout projects at Mt. Helix Park. Unfortunately, that option was only available to boys.

In February of 2019, she seized her opportunity to fulfill her dream and make history when the 110-year-old youth leadership program was opened up to girls. She joined 1,000 other girls across America who completed projects in their respective communities, culminating in a live streamed ceremony in February of 2021.

Like her brothers, Rotsart chose Mt. Helix Park as the recipient of her project, resulting in a new kiosk located in one of the Park's open space lots near the corner of Vivera and Mt. Helix Drive.

"I am pretty happy," exclaimed the La Mesa native who has grown up visiting and volunteering for the Park. The difference, she said, is that instead of helping others to complete their scout projects, she was now being given the opportunity to complete her own.

"I was excited to earn my scout rank. My brothers got their Eagle Scout rank. Legend earned his before it was announced

that girls could, and Xylen earned his about the same time it was announced that girls could go into the scouts," she explained.

The new information kiosk is a duplicate of one that sits in the Park's picnic area and was constructed in 2005 by former board member John Mead.

With the help of family and friends and using wood donated by La Mesa Lumber, Rotsart worked from designs which Mead provided and was able to complete construction in just over two weeks.

"She did a terrific job," said Mead, who received his Eagle Scout rank in 1973. "I'm proud that she did it and that she's among the first graduating class of female Eagle Scouts."

Rotsart admits the 8-foot, Douglas fir structure was physically challenging to build, but says the rewards were well worth the effort.

"It was a great learning experience for me having to do research for the project and work with the Mt. Helix Park and different organizations to get the project built. I'm so happy with the way it turned out. I think it looks great." ■

Best Apps to Download to your phone

For Plant Identification:

iNaturalist 

For Animal Identification:

Seek 



Volunteer Spotlight

The Alpha Project: Restoration For The Soul

by Peggy Junker

Bob McElroy starts most workdays with a drive to Mt. Helix Park. Arriving before the crowds, he parks, walks along the rock wall, then up to the top for some quiet contemplation. The routine makes him feel “closer to God,” says Alpha Project founder and CEO, who runs one of San Diego’s most recognizable non-profit organizations dedicated to the relief and rehabilitation of the city’s homeless population.

McElroy began Alpha Project in 1986 after what he describes as “an Apostle Paul type of experience” which compelled the native San Diegan to devote his life to serving others. Starting out with only a truck and a purpose, the Alpha Project has grown exponentially and now serves 4,000 people daily, assisting them on the road to “complete and permanent independence through education, employment, sobriety, and stability,” according to their Mission Statement.

Incorporating a network of low-income housing and an array of programs that address everything from rehabilitation and healthcare to job-training and home ownership, the organization has been recognized nationally by former President George H.W. Bush as “the country’s 185th Point of Light” and lauded for empowering its clients “to take personal responsibility for solving problems,” according to their website.

McElroy, guided by his faith, says scriptures from the Bible describe both altruism and hard work—two principles central to his philosophy. “You’ve got to help someone else; you’ve got to give them a hand. If you don’t work, you don’t eat. The blessings you have, you’ve got to share with others. That’s what we do in a nutshell.” Embracing these truths, in 2020, one of the most challenging years in the Park’s recent history, Alpha Project’s “Wheels of Change” crew began helping out, taking on some of the most rigorous landscaping projects on the Park’s “to do” list. Working alongside Park staff, the team cleared off-site lots at the corner of Viverra and Mt. Helix Drive and removed invasive thorn bushes from habitat restoration areas. McElroy says the work is part of the healing process for his crews, with many of them coming from troubled backgrounds involving gangs, drugs and incarceration.

Moved by the generosity of the Yawkey family who built and donated the 12-acre nature Park in 1925, he describes the space as “spiritual.”

“We brought 20 people up from the shelter and they still talk about it. It is a blessed place. You just feel better when you leave,” explains McElroy, adding that his team has enjoyed their interaction with Park representatives. “You acknowl-

edged them as human beings. There’s no therapy that’s better than that. We tell them that all the time, but when you acknowledge them as valued, important folks, that changes their whole life, that makes my job easier.” ■



Bob McElroy



Photos by Gary Severt

Theater Returns to the Park



by Peggy Junker

Dipping their toe into the waters of a state just reopening after over a year of pandemic shut-downs, Off Broadway Theater Company launched a carefully planned reentry into stage production this spring when it presented the musical “Be More Chill” at Mt. Helix Park.

Scaling ticket sales to a fraction of what the amphitheater could hold in a normal year, selling only “family pods” composed of five seats, and enforcing strict distancing, Executive Producer, Director and Choreographer, Kyle Hawk said they wanted to do everything by the book. Following daily monitored CDC guidelines, he and Co-Director and Choreographer, Joy Allen, had to continually adjust for whatever was being recommended that day.

Their diligence made it possible for the cast of 24 high school singers and dancers to go on stage following eleven months of delay— a cathartic performance for these teens, many of whom had missed their entire school year. Having foregone proms, graduation ceremonies and grad nights, the talented

youths put their all into the two-hour production, wearing protective face masks for the entire show.

“It was amazing!” said an emotional Hawk of the shows three performances. “The number one thing I got from everyone was how great the show was, but also how much excitement and joy was on our performers’ faces after trying to tell this story for the past year, waiting through the pandemic, on hold.”

Hawk and Allen, both veteran Christian Youth Theater performers, run the theater company which is a non-profit 501(c)3. Hawk says times are difficult for the performing arts and they were not able to break even, adding that profit was not the criteria.

“The joy that I had the whole week and weekend: it was all surreal. It did more for us than money.”

Hopeful that a successful event at Mt. Helix Park might pave the way for future performances, Hawk says he believes theirs was the first full, live production to sell tickets in California during the pandemic. ■



**ADOPT
a Habitat**

Adopting their plot in March, Charles and Patti Turkle along with friend Rhea turned the area from weeds to California native plants in record time. Working tirelessly for the past two months the team has removed all invasive weeds and added more than a dozen California natives which they are nurturing until established.





Mt. Helix Park's 104th *Easter Sunrise Service*

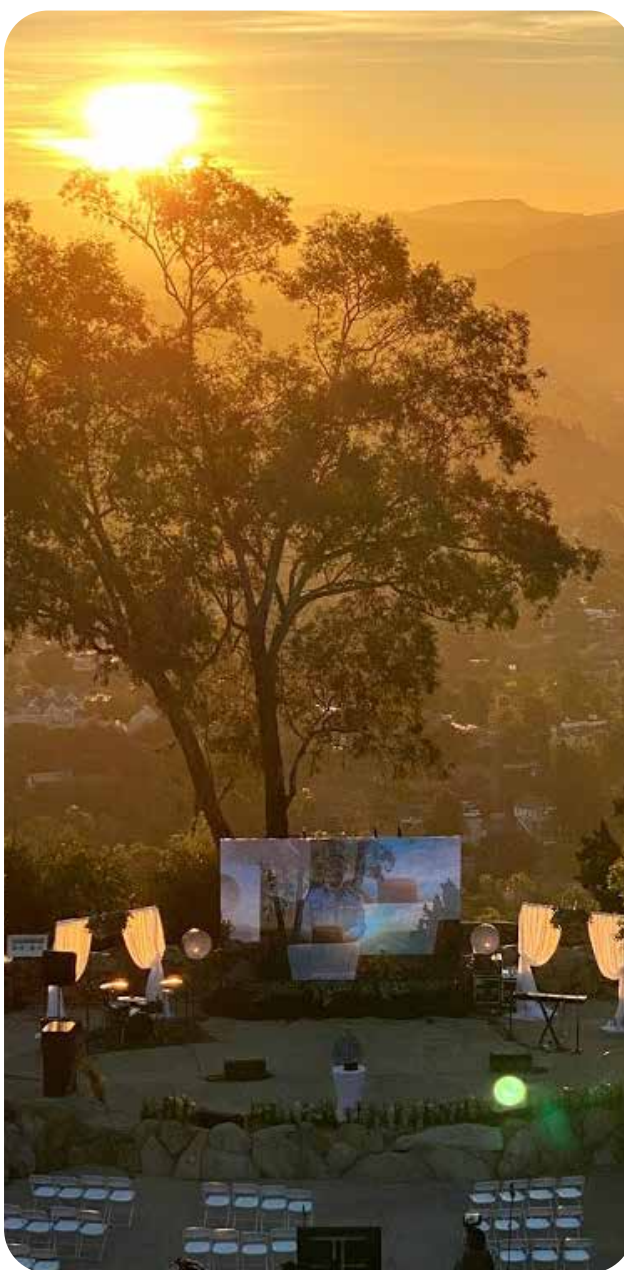
by Peggy Junker

Mt. Helix Park's sunrise Easter service reached the world via livestream for the second year in a row. The 104-year-old celebration is the second longest running Easter sunrise service in the United States. This year's event was made possible by Faith Chapel, which produced a polished presentation complete with live music, testimonials, and an Easter sermon delivered by Lead Pastor Brian Ross. The service extended far beyond the 60-person live crowd to roughly 1,600 online viewers via YouTube.

Despite difficult circumstances, the 36-minute program fulfilled the Mt. Helix Park Foundation's commitment to continuing the sunrise service tradition, uninterrupted for another year.

Opening with a verse from the Gospel of John, Ross addressed the heaviness that the world is experiencing and the struggle to cope, offering a continued faith in God and Jesus Christ as a place of solace.

Ross says this is the first time his church has conducted an Easter service at the Park and called the experience "a blessing." Attended primarily by church members, most of whom would



Mt. Helix Sunrise Service presented by Faith Chapel
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yi8BDNfuws>

be working later services that morning, he noted that the experience of having an outdoor event made the logistical challenges of this venue worthwhile.

"It was incredible to be there when the sun came up, and to worship the Lord on Easter and the Resurrection. It was more than I had anticipated," recalls Ross.

"We are thankful that Faith Chapel stepped up to produce our sunrise Easter service this year," said Mt. Helix Park Executive Director, Krista Powers, who also addressed the live stream audience. "It was an incredible production filled with music from their worship band and a powerful message delivered by Pastor Brian. Live streaming of this quality is something the Foundation could not have done on its own. As I watched all the volunteers working together to create the stage design and set up the production equipment on Saturday, I knew we were in for an Easter sunrise treat. God's gifts were with us once again as the sun burst forth over the mountains to the East, setting the perfect backdrop for another year honoring his promise." ■

Thank You for making Mt. Helix Park a special haven for our community! We are forever grateful!

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Board Farewells

by Peggy Junker



Sharon Bullard Helping to create and implement a structure for the Mt. Helix Park Foundation's Board of Directors and its Executive Director position were two of Sharon Bullard's greatest contributions during her tenure as Vice President of Development. Serving on the board's Governance Committee, Bullard would spend countless hours hammering out guidelines to serve the Foundation for years to come. Then, in January of this year, she made the difficult decision to resign due to family matters that required her to divert her time and energy.

Serving on the Foundation board since late 2018, Bullard was invited to join by long-time friend Keith Meeker, who also resigned this year. Meeker said he believed that Bullard's 40 years of experience as a bank executive along with her service as President and Vice President of the Cuyamaca College Foundation (later the Grossmont Cuyamaca College Foundation) would be an asset to the Park's board.

"Sharon is the epitome of perfection," stated Meeker of Bullard's qualifications for the Board. Her resume is endless."

"I believe in what the founding family wanted," points out Bullard. "I think it's important for the Park to remain non-denominational," she added. "I love East County and the Park," explains Bullard, "People always think it's just for Mt. Helix—it's really not, it's for East County. I wanted to know the Park would survive and do well."



Keith Meeker Few would disagree that for 16 years, Keith Meeker served as one of the Park's primary gatekeepers. Not in the usual sense—the Park gates open and close automatically—but in the sense that very few contracts and executive decisions have been made without Meeker's counsel since he first took a seat on the board in 2002.

During his service on the Mt. Helix Park Foundation Board of Directors, Meeker, along with fellow board member and attorney, Bob Ball, has provided guidance for some of the Park's most significant projects and contracts.

Now, following the closing of his law practice in 2020 and his retirement, Meeker says it is time to take a step back and do the things he has been too busy to do.

Throwing his hat in the ring not long after the board was initially formed, Meeker's service followed that of his wife, Judy Meeker. Taking a leave of absence from 2006 to 2009, he then returned to the board serving continuously until this year.

Having sat on just about every board committee at some point, Meeker's tenure and his broad understanding of the Park operations have given him unique insights that helped him to do what he set out to do—look after the best interests of the Park.

"From a liability point of view, we needed to protect the Foundation Board and in turn the Park," explains Meeker, who said he reread the Park's Trust document annually for inspiration and purpose. "That would always give me a basis of what this is all about."

Facilitating an organizational chart and processes to guide future stewards of the Park, Meeker says he has authored many of the Foundation's core documents including Amended By-Laws, Rules and Regulations, along with the boilerplate forms and contracts the Park will use for years to come. Meeker said he felt he had completed some of his most important work and resigned early 2021.

Meeker says he is looking forward to having more time for his long "to do" list which includes travel and continued service to several other boards on which he still serves, including the Jarrett Meeker Foundation, founded for his late son in order to "provide programs related to wildlife, conservation, and the environment for children and young adults in San Diego County."



David Avants In 2010 when the Mt. Helix Park Foundation Board of Directors identified their need for a director with a construction and building background, they could not have found a more dedicated volunteer than David Avants. Few recall the Park before the gates were installed and the Park office and storage room were built out, but David Avants

does. Brought on board by former Executive Director, Amanda Bond, and Past-President, Mark Allan, Avants says he spent the entire summer of 2010, along with his brother-in-law, Matt, constructing the two spaces under the stage that he described as "a mess." That "mess" is now the administrative hub of the Park and houses two full-time staff members with the storage room doubling as a green room for Park events.

Volunteering in the Park even before his election to the Board, Avants' initial task was to oversee the donation of supplies and the repainting of the memorial cross. His "To Do List" would quickly grow and come to include many of the Park's most significant construction and restoration projects. "I was a sounding board for what we could and could not do in the Park," describes Avants of his role on the Board.

The growth of business and more travel obligations in his professional role as an Install Lead for AVI, one of the largest audiovisual companies in the U.S., prompted Avants to step down from the Board.

Born in San Bernardino, and relocating to La Mesa during high school, the 1985 Helix High School graduate and father of three says he has a special place in his heart for the other board members. "The people genuinely care more about others in the community and the Park," he reflects, adding, "It's unlike anything I've ever seen. Their heart is in it and I was really proud to be part of that."



Sarah Gehman After a year of service on the Mt. Helix Park Foundation's Board of Directors, Sarah Gehman announced she will be relocating to Spoken, Washington, in the fall to pursue her master's in business administration at Gonzaga University. Simultaneously she will be starting a new posi-

Heart of the Park

The Mt. Helix Park Foundation Board of Directors

by Krista Powers



Bob Ball



Ron Brady



Steve Clay



**Helgi
Gudmundson**



Norm Hapke



Caroline Harrod

As the Executive Director of the Mt. Helix Park Foundation, I am guided and governed by our nonprofit board. I am blessed to work with and be mentored by this talented board filled with people whose hearts are in the right place and are truly here not for themselves, but because they love what Mt. Helix Park provides for the community. They are each dedicated to ensuring the Park continues to be a free, safe, clean, and beautiful green space open to all. Additionally, all board members serve on our various committees including finance, habitat, facilities, events, volunteers, and fundraising. As a working board, they support not only with their finances, but can often be seen in the Park with volunteers doing everything from putting trash cans together to setting up for events. I am honored to serve our community with this incredible group of people, and I would like to introduce you to our current board.

Bob Ball: Founding member of the Mt. Helix Park Foundation and Past President. Bob's involvement started in the early 1990's after two lawsuits were filed by others with an aim to divest County control of the Park and remove the Cross from the top of Mt. Helix. A lawyer by profession, and long-time member of the Mt. Helix community, Bob worked with then County Supervisor Dianne Jacob and San Diego County Counsel and orchestrated a resolution that was accepted by both of the plaintiffs in those lawsuits and getting those lawsuits dismissed. Bob created the Mt. Helix Park Foundation in 1998 as a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation and, with the court's approval, on November 24, 1999, secured an Order from the San Diego Superior Court transferring custody of the Park to the Foundation and having the Foundation designated as the Successor Trustee of the Yawkey-White Trust Indenture that created the Park in the 1929. Bob has remained a member of the Park's Board of Directors since inception. Bob also was instrumental in working with the management and ownership of Cox Communications in acquiring excess land at the top of Mt. Helix that was part purchase and part donation, an area now known as Sunrise Point, doubling the size of the Park. Bob also worked with mobile cell carriers AT&T and Verizon and secured long term leases for cell towers that provide crucial income to the Park and help defray some of the Park's operating expenses and capital improvements. Bob continues to serve on Foundation committees and overseeing implementation of the Trust directives and is currently working on securing a long-term lease with the San Miguel Fire District that occupies the lower trust property. Bob has been a resident of the Mt. Helix community since 1982 and has been married for 39 years to Deborah who had careers as an SICU nurse at Sharp Memorial Hospital and as a Nurse Practitioner in the SDSU Student Health Center on campus. Bob and Deborah have four grown children, all of whom also reside in the area, one who is a teacher in a local elementary school, one who is an engineer for the US Government, one who is a Santee Firefighter and Paramedic and one who is also a lawyer for a global law firm. FUN FACT: Bob's son, Cameron, founded Helix Brewing Company, a local brewery located in La Mesa.

Ron Brady: Ron Brady is not only an incredible businessman and mentor, but he and his wife Mary Alice are true gifts to our community. Philanthropists that truly care about our community, especially ensuring all children have the chance at a bright future. Ron is frequently

See BOARD on page 12



Jason Kardos



**Christopher
Kilrain**



**Celina
Laframboise**



Andy Phemister



Alice Smith



Don Teemsma



Wes Troy

heard saying, "It's better to build kids than try to mend adults." Ron reminds us of our mission as a board and to not lose sight of what is truly important. His actions speak louder than words, and we are very thankful he is an important part of our board. Ron serves on our Fundraising committee and has helped the Park raise much needed funds on numerous occasions. He is a true go-getter, filled with wisdom, and never seems to slow down. We often refer to his words of wisdom and hope he will write a book. FUN FACT: Ron has 27 grandchildren and 6 great grandchildren, and he can name every one of them.

Steve Clay: Steve brings vibrance and fun to our board. When not at the Park, he and his wife, Janelle, can be found at their Postal Annex in La Mesa Springs. Steve's family has been in the area for four generations, and somewhere in our picture of the 1925 Easter Sunrise Service Amphitheater dedication is his great-grandfather. Steve serves on our Marketing and Fundraising committee. From sailing to horse adventures with his grandchildren, he always has a fun story to offer. FUN FACT: He loves to cook and listen to blues, jazz, and rock n roll. As Steve says, "Nothing is better than going to Cabo, putting my feet in the sand, a drink in my hand, and a good fish taco. Life is good."

Helgi Gudmundson: Helgi brings sense and sensibility to our board. He and his wife live a short distance from the Park, which we are very thankful for as we often need his skills on office tasks. Helgi can also be seen rolling up his sleeves and volunteering in the dirt with members of the Habitat and Facilities teams. With an amazing resume, including past COO of Price Club, we are also very lucky to have his talents on our Finance Committee. FUN FACT: Helgi has a beautiful Doberman rescue named Reva who loves to go hiking and has been a part of many activities in the Park, sometimes even letting her dad know when she feels his meeting has gone on too long.

Norm Hapke: Norm and Valerie Hapke are longtime residents of Mt Helix, Park supporters, and wonderful philanthropists in the community. Norm is our current sitting President and brings his wise wisdom shaped by the Naval Academy, USMC, and Dale Carnegie. He is animated and keeps our board meetings moving along at an

organized pace while having fun. He is presidential and meaningful in the guidance of our staff, VPs, and committees while providing unlimited nuggets of wisdom and deep thought. Valerie was instrumental in saving our 2020 fundraiser when we had to pivot to online. She quickly came up with fun, creative ideas, that we could bring to the homes of Park supporters. The Hapke's raised two children on Mt. Helix and have been here since 1982. FUN FACT: Norm and Valerie are new grandparents while balancing a new puppy and older dog that is not quite sure what to do with either.

Caroline Harrod : Caroline is one of our most active board members. We are also thankful to her husband Mike who donates countless hours to the Park. Caroline is the rock of many committees. She has been integral in the restoration of our native habitat. Additionally, many of our facilities projects were completed because of her previous government experience including working for past Supervisor Jacob and serving on the San Miguel Fire Board. Her talent for connecting people has inspired many local businesses and individuals to help in the ongoing maintenance and restoration of the Park. Recognizing our need for help with Marketing and Fundraising committees, she has recently taken the VP of Development position and is currently working to build our event, volunteer, and fundraising committees. FUN FACT: Caroline is well on her way to becoming a native plant expert in transitioning not only the Park but her own yard as well. She has begun a YouTube channel named "Growing San Diego," her yard is recognized as a pollinator habitat, and her landscape was recently recognized on the California Native Plant Societies Garden Tour.

Jason Kardos: Jason brings his vivacious and cheerful energy to our board. As a local Realtor®, he is active in the digital media space and has helped the Park with everything from marketing videos to keeping up with our social media. Jason lends his expertise to our Volunteer, Event, and Fundraising committees, often helping us recruit new members at events. Jason, his wife, and daughter have lived in the area since 2001. FUN FACT: His second favorite place, aside from the Park, is the historic Gold Mine town of Julian, and he can often be found working on some properties he manages up there.

Chris Kilrain: Chris is a partner at Percy Financial Planners and brings his financial wisdom to our board. He is currently serving as our CFO, but often steps in to help with our Fundraising and Event committees. Chris and his wife, Elizabeth, have been La Mesa residents for four years. While he is often in a crisp, well-pressed suit, he is always ready to roll up his sleeves, set up for events, sign up new Park members, and help with our guest experiences at our fundraiser. Chris grows his own vegetables, loves tasty culinary delights and fine beverages. He managed restaurants, bars, and lounges for 10 years and has won multiple cocktail and cooking competitions. He has two large lovable dogs, Abe and Milo. FUN FACT: Chris grew up living on a boat in Santa Barbara for 14 years and he still loves to sail.

Celina Laframboise: A San Diego native, Celina is earning her MBA in Sustainability and Environmental Compliance from Southern New Hampshire University. She has worked on several environmental projects directly with government, corporate, education and international clients to strategically implement projects that address their specific needs in social responsibility, community engagement, energy efficiency, forest conservation, and zero waste events. In addition to being the secretary, she serves on the Habitat, Marketing, and Volunteer committees. We are also thankful for Celina's mom, Christine, who has also become an important and active Habitat volunteer. FUN FACT: Celina is a backpacking and travel enthusiast. She has made it to 5 out of the 7 continents with plans to complete all of them by 2023.

Andy Phemister: Andy is a longtime East County leader. He served in both the La Mesa and East County Chambers of Commerce as Special Events Director, Editor of the East County News, Communications Director and Vice President. After his Chamber career, Andy returned to real estate working for previous Executive Director and longtime board member, Tracey Stotz. Andy has worn many hats on the board since 2004, including, Secretary, Governance committee, Marketing Committee and serves as our Nominating Committee chair. His wife, Susan, takes an active role in our Habitat committee. He and Susan have lived in East County since they were children. FUN FACT: Andy has been playing trombone since 1964, and enjoys playing with the SDSU Marching Aztec Alumni Band at SDSU homecomings.

Alice Smith: Alice is the great-great granddaughter of Mary Yawkey for whom the Park was dedicated. She lives in Florida with her husband, Joe, and summers in Wisconsin on a lake where her Yawkey ancestors lived. She also helps edit our member magazine and provides us with historical references. We are lucky to have our founding families continue to be involved in the Park. FUN FACT: Despite her Florida address, downhill skiing is her passion.

Don Teemsma: As the owner of Ideal Plumbing, Heating, Air, and Electrical, Don has brought many resources and important knowledge to the Mt. Helix Park Foundation. Don currently serves on our facilities committee and has also been instrumental in bringing volunteers into the Park. Don can frequently be seen helping with the heavy lifting of event set-up, clean-up, and sometimes serving donuts at Easter Sunrise Service. Don and Melissa keep themselves busy with five children and have been long-time residents of the area. FUN FACT: Don enjoys cooking, the outdoors, and camping with the family.

Wes Troy: After donating the lumber for our pump house roof and fire station kiosk project, we are happy to say that Wes also agreed to lend his valuable expertise to our board and step right into the chairperson role of the Facilities Committee. Wes' family has long been active in the community, running La Mesa Lumber since 1945. Wes also has a background in CA State Parks, and love of the outdoors, making him the perfect fit for many of our initiatives and goals. He is a true complement to our board with his fun personality and great attitude toward life. FUN FACT: Wes once made the swim from Alcatraz Island to San Francisco. The only thought going through his head was, "I paid to do this?" ■

tion on the fundraising team at the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS).

Gehman leaves behind her immediate family, as well as her position as the Individual Giving and Stewardship Officer for the New Children's Museum.

Joining the Mt. Helix Park Foundation Board of Directors in early 2020, just before the COVID-19 shutdown and amidst a string of canceled Park events, Gehman says she had hoped to have more of an opportunity to bring her development and fundraising expertise to the Park.

The Foundation Board and staff wish Gehman the best of luck in her new endeavors! ■



Senior Volunteer Patrol

The Senior Volunteer Patrol (SVP) visit Mt. Helix Park after pausing operations for one-year due to COVID-19.

Typically checking on the Park throughout the week these volunteers have been missed! Pictured here from the Sheriff's Department at Rancho San Diego station SVP unit, Tom Beltz (left) and Bill Griffith (right).

Thank you for helping to keep an eye on the Park.

Thank You To Our Business Members



FAMILY FUN IN THE PARK

A herpetologist is a zoologist who studies reptiles.

Special thanks to the amazing Dictionary Hill advocate and native plant expert, Jim Merzbacher, for helping with this article!

FUN LIZARD FACTS

- Lizards are cold blooded. This means they can't regulate their own body temperature and need the sun to raise their temperature.
- Lizards love to eat insects and eat many of the ones we consider pests like termites and scorpions.
- Some lizards detach their tails when they are caught by a predator. This is called autotomy.
- Most lizards can swim.



Lizards of Mt. Helix Park

Can you spot them all?



Most abundant lizard at the Park
Western Fence Lizard, specifically the Great Basin Fence Lizard

DESCRIPTION: Males have blue markings on the sides of the belly edged in black, a single large blue patch on the throat. Some scales on a male's back become blue or greenish when he is in the light phase. Females have a plain belly or one with faint blue markings, no blue or green color on the upper surfaces, and dark bars or crescents on the back.
Size: 4 to 10 inches.

FUN FACT: They can change color from light grey or tan to nearly jet black, but they probably use this ability for the purpose of thermoregulation while basking and not as a means to camouflage themselves

BEHAVIORS: Push-ups: Males establish and defend a territory containing elevated perches where they can observe mates and potential rival males. Males defend their territory and try to attract females with head-bobbing and a push-up display that exposes the blue throat and ventral colors.

A study suggests that protein in the blood of Western Fence Lizards kills Lyme Disease bacterium in nymphal ticks when they attach themselves to a lizard and ingest the lizard's blood. This could explain why Lyme disease is less common in California.

Whiptail Lizard

Description: Long, slender body, pointed snouts, and extremely long tails. **Size:** Up to 9 inches.

FUN FACTS: Juveniles have a tail with a bluer hue. Very active, moving with abrupt stops and starts, side-to-side head movement, and tongue flicking. Often seen digging rapidly when foraging.

Difficult to approach. Typically foraging near cover, and capable of quick bursts of speed into heavy brush or holes.

Diet: Small invertebrates, especially spiders, scorpions, centipedes, and termites.

Conservation Issues: It inhabits only about 25 percent of its former range. Much of the habitat it needs for survival has been destroyed by development.



Side-Blotched Lizard

Description: Adult overall length is 5 to 6 inches. This species is smaller than the fence lizard, has a smooth skin, and gets its name from a small bluish black spot on each side in back of the front legs. Colors vary from light tan to brownish, with gray in some specimens. Adult males and females have quite different patterns. Females usually have a chevron pattern on top with (sometimes) faint longitudinal stripes on each side. Males usually show a blue speckled pattern on top.



Woodland Alligator Lizard - AKA San Diego Alligator Lizard

Size: They can be up to 17 inches.

Habits: They can be out in the daytime and early morning and evening, and sometimes nocturnal. Active during daylight and twilight, but sometimes active at night during hot weather. Inactive during cold weather in winter. Alligator lizards are generally secretive, tending to hide in brush or under rocks, although they are often seen foraging out in the open or on roads in the morning and evening. They are common inhabitants of suburban yards and garages.

Defensive Behavior: They are unfairly known for their bite and will only bite if threatened when held or picked up. They will bite predators as well and have been known to hold their legs close to their body to mimic a dangerous snake. In some cases they will bite the head of a predatory snake to keep from being bitten. In one account a small alligator Lizard bit its own tail and held it so that a snake was unable to swallow it.

Alligator Lizards are well known for dropping their tail when threatened. The tail then wiggles and distracts the predator long enough for the Lizard to escape. The tail will regenerate and grow back but it takes a lot of energy, and the tail will not be as well shaped as the original one.



MT. HELIX PARK FOUNDATION

An Evening Under the Stars

SATURDAY SEP 25 6PM

An intimate evening surrounded by the beauty of Mt. Helix Nature Preserve and Historic Amphitheater.

Join us as we gather again to celebrate the friends and family who have made Mt. Helix Park possible, and raise money to ensure its presence for future generations to make their memories.

*Tickets on Sale July 1
Early Bird tickets start at \$200 per plate*

Underwriting & Sponsorship Opportunities
Contact: Krista Powers 619.985.1445 or
K Powers@MtHelixPark.org



2021 Fundraiser

As things slowly reopen, we faced a second year of challenges in mapping out what our crucial annual fundraiser would look like. We are happy to announce that while the annual food & wine festival was not appropriate for this year, we are doing a very special evening in the Park to raise those critical funds. We invite you to join us for an evening of dining and dancing under the stars at beautiful Mt. Helix Park on Saturday, September 25 from 6 - 10 pm.

Tickets will be limited and start at \$200 per person. This includes cocktail hour, sit down catered dinner, entertainment, and more for an intimate evening Under the Stars.

Underwriting and Business Partnerships are available until July 1. Please contact Krista Powers at 619.985.1445 or email: K Powers@MtHelixPark.org

Thank you for your continued support of Mt. Helix Park for our community!

KRISTA from page 3

occasions with his incredible knowledge. Our newest Adopt-A-Habitat caretakers, Charles and Patti Turkle are close to eradicating a bank full of nasty mustard weed and are turning it into a native-plant wonderland. I am personally thankful to them, along with Christine Laframboise (board member Celina's mom), and the Just Serve Friday volunteers for helping on my steep hill that was once full of invasive weeds. A three-year project to restore the east hillside almost went south this year after my severe ankle injury last December. These volunteers stepped in, watering, and weeding this hillside for me. We now have a hill full of beautiful native wildflowers that will increase each year.

I could go on and on about the angels who grace our habitat efforts and help us in so many ways. Some make it out once a month and some come weekly. They ALL make a difference! ■

COFFEE from page 4

Jean and Allen are excited that the Park is promoting and using endemic plants. "Although California was declared to be drought free in 2019, that one winter, a winter here and there, with rainfall doesn't really get you out of a drought as evidenced by this past winter with half of our normal rainfall. To be using water for landscaping is beyond me when there are opportunities to go to California native or drought resistant landscaping that are just as good if not better." ■

SEBASTIAN from page 4

its own life onto new generations. Nature abounds with examples where unrelated organisms are uniquely adapted and attracted to assisting in the reproduction of another. For example, there is a plant which is usually sold in nurseries or spoken of as the chaparral yucca (*Hesperoyucca whipplei*). It is practically pollinated by only one species of moth. If this moth were to become extinct, then the chaparral yucca has a strong likelihood of disappearing. At the same time, a chaparral yucca will host a wide range of other life. Hummingbirds use the dried flower stalks as supports for their nests, and the plant's spines offer protection to lizards from other predators. At least one species of native bee will bite a hole through the flower stalk of the white sage (*Salvia apiana*), making a nest inside. These relationships demonstrate how different species work together as a community to thrive, live, and adapt in this world. So, in the pursuit of propagating native plants, it is integral to learn about the local ecosystem that is around you. Through this perspective, you will learn the role you can play to continue life's legacy.

There is so much to learn about our local ecosystems, both from a personal and collective standpoint. Choosing to propagate a native plant species which is hyperlocal may be difficult because many plants have been killed off as a result of colonization, ranching, urban sprawl, too-many fires, climate change, herbicides, and others. However, as you explore the natural world through hiking, watching videos, reading, and learning from native plant friends, you will learn more! By learning and thinking local, your actions have the greatest impact on the natural world closest to our hearts and homes. ■

Sebastian Revels is a local California Landscape Designer. He joined our Habitat Restoration Group in 2019, is part of the Adopt-A-Habitat Program at the Park, and is currently restoring one of the Park's habitats near the main parking lot. ■



MT. HELIX PARK FOUNDATION

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Make a Gift: Become a Friend of the Park!

Become a Park Member

Please consider becoming a "Friend of the Park" member by making a tax deductible donation in the enclosed envelope. Your donation helps ensure Mt. Helix Park remains an oasis of beauty in our community by supporting on-going operations and free public programs.



Our Event, Marketing, and Volunteer Committees NEED YOU!

Do you like throwing parties? Putting together a Family Movie Night? Music in the Park? Wine Tasting? Or maybe you are passionate about the Pollinators and want to get the word out? As the county reopens, the Park is almost back to its full hustle and bustle. We are all thrilled to

see so many returning faces from our community, but what this also means is that we need volunteers to help with programming! Our "committees" meet once a month for some cheer and planning. Give Krista a call or text if you are interested. We would love to have you! 619.985.1445. ■

In Most Years - **ANNUAL EVENTS**

FALL

HALLOWEEN HARVEST FESTIVAL

NATURE LECTURE

WINTER

CHRISTMAS ON MT. HELIX

PRAYER & WORSHIP GATHERING

GMIA NEIGHBORHOOD WALK UP

SPRING

SUNRISE EASTER SERVICE SINCE 1917

CHRISTIAN MUSIC FESTIVAL

SUMMER

MEMBER APPRECIATION EVENTS

ASTRONOMY NIGHT

FOOD, WINE, & ART FESTIVAL

DO YOU LIKE EVENTS?

**Mt. Helix Park
needs YOU!**

**HELP DEVELOP COMMUNITY
PROGRAMMING AT MT. HELIX PARK
JOIN OUR FUN EVENT, MARKETING,
& VOLUNTEER COMMITTEES**

**Call 619.741.4363 or
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