Patrolling County Open Space on Horseback

By Scott Harrop

Civic Center Volunteer Linda Novy had already spent five years volunteering with Marin County Parks when she moved her horse to Creekside Equestrian Center in Woodacre. Back then her nametag read: “ESP Leader” for Environmental Steward Program Leader. With the move to Woodacre came great access to trails for Linda and her horse, so 12 years ago she joined a volunteer patrol program for equestrians, hikers, and mountain bikers. This program is coordinated by the Parks Department’s Open Space division and includes 24 members.

Wearing their smart volunteer vests with the Marin County Parks logo, they strive to be diplomatic as they share information, give directions, and explain ordinances. But they are not enforcers, being as likely to introduce children to their horses as to remind hikers, equestrians, and bikers of regulations.

Recently, Linda explained to a young child the difference between parks, which are more for play and sports, and nature preserves, places for conservation and appreciating plants and animals. Open Space preserves offer a balance between visiting nature and preserving nature, including respectfully observing wildlife such as snakes, frogs, coyotes, bobcats, foxes, spotted owls, salamanders and more. In addition to being the homes of animals, preserves have unique native plant communities, including riparian corridors along creeks, a magnet for everyone.

“It’s a different mindset when you’re out on the trail. You can’t anticipate what you will encounter,” said Linda. She has encountered bikes speeding around...
22 YEARS
Mary Bowles (Tiburon), Roger Felton (Belvedere), Helen Lindqvist (Tiburon), Rosine Reynolds (Larkspur), Stewards, Parks
19 YEARS
Grant Pritchard (Novato), Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service/Auxiliary Communications Service (RACES/ACS) Volunteer, Sheriff’s Office
18 YEARS
James Malaspina (Palm Springs), Al Baumann (Petaluma), Patrol Volunteers, Parks
13 YEARS
Barbara Levin (San Rafael), Nora Martinis (Corte Madera), Senior Peer Counselors, Health & Human Services (HHS)
12 YEARS
Robert Eichstaedt (Larkspur), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff’s Office
10 YEARS
Sandra Walker (San Rafael), Chaplain, Sheriff’s Office
Cara Wadens (Petaluma), Senior Access Reader, Novato Library
8 YEARS
Donald Johnson (Fairfax), Patrol Volunteer, Parks
Kathryn Mitchell-Ball (San Rafael), Senior Peer Counselor, HHS
7 YEARS
Andrew Pope (Sausalito), Maintenance Aide, Community Development Agency
6 YEARS
Susan Buster (Woodacre), Shaver, Fairfax Library
5 YEARS
Jen Bach (Tomales), Volunteer Firefighter, Tomales Station, Fire
Curt Simon (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff’s Office
3 YEARS
David Ball (San Rafael), Consumer Mediator, District Attorney’s Office
Jerry Kay (Novato), Stephen Sarhad (San Rafael), RACES/ACS Volunteers, Sheriff’s Office
Earl McCowen (Novato), Marty McCowen (Novato), Patrol Volunteers, Parks
2 YEARS
Richard Gordon (Novato), English Tutor, Novato Library
Nicholas Koo (El Sobrante), Maric Aæwen (Novato), Adam Vasquez (Larkspur), Celena Tanguay (Oakland), Michael Synder (Berkeley), Chris Patella (San Francisco), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteers, Sheriff’s Office
Sydney Lundquist (Dublin), Dalynn McEwen (Novato), Tessa Pares (Muir Beach), Maxwell Tripp (Mill Valley), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteers, Sheriff’s Office
Robin Meisel (San Rafael), Ombudsman, HHS
Satvik Namburu (San Rafael), Teen Program Intern, Civic Center Library
1 YEAR
Rose Lupo (San Rafael), Steward, Parks
Rocket Williams (San Anselmo), Max Duran (San Anselmo), Student Service Interns, Fairfax Library
Bobby Wood (San Rafael), Volunteer View Layout Volunteer, Human Resources

Happy Anniversary!

We congratulate these volunteers who celebrate their anniversaries this month and thank them for their involvement.

Horseback Patrol
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blind corners, off-leash dogs on trails, and the occasional pop-up campsite. Volunteers don’t approach campsites, but immediately call ranger headquarters. Sometimes, on mounted patrol, she’ll meet a fellow equestrian with an off-leash dog where it’s not allowed, or leaving a trail that is seasonally closed. Equestrians are easy for her to talk to: “We all speak the same ‘language’ and want to retain our horse-riding privileges. Obeying the rules is important.”

Linda once encountered a woman in Cascade Canyon Preserve who appeared disoriented. The woman couldn’t find her dog, whom she had tied to a tree. Linda helped her get water and feel safe, and then called rangers. She and a deputy sheriff searched unsuccessfully until nighttime, but next day neighbors and an Open Space ranger found the dog safe and sound in a canyon. A happy ending.

Mounted Patrol volunteers report information via an online system, logging numbers of hikers, equestrians, bikers, and dogs, property damage, road and trail conditions, and more. They may note downed trees, what’s in bloom, and information about invasive non-native plants. The latter ignite Linda’s professional side as a landscape management consultant. “I can’t help myself. I get off my horse and start pulling!”

Linda’s staff supervisor is Parks Volunteer Coordinator Greg Reza. “Linda is one of our most consistent reporters in the volunteer Mounted Patrol program,” he said. “Her reports are detailed, allowing rangers to quickly and efficiently handle issues. She often comes across property problems that she can handle without ranger assistance and will roll up her sleeves and take care of a downed limb or vegetation impeding the trail right on the spot. She is a great person to have on our patrol team.”

Linda’s horse, Falco, a 19-year-old Andalusian gelding, has been her trail partner for nearly 15 years. She gladly shares him with visitors, especially children. Dismounting, she introduces Falco to them. “It’s important to keep the horse tradition alive,” she said. The volunteers’ horses are rigorously tested to ensure that they remain calm in a variety of situations. Volunteers also attend refresher courses in first aid and CPR.

Linda has patrolled at the Roy’s Redwoods, Maurice Thorner Memorial, Rush Creek, Mt. Burdell, Horse Hill, French Ranch, and Giacomini preserves. She hopes to visit the rest of the county’s preserves, 34 in all, while on patrol with Falco.

As if volunteering in the parks four times a week in good weather weren’t enough, Linda is president of the Marin Conservation League, whose mission is to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural resources of Marin County for the community’s benefit.

Would you like to volunteer in Marin’s beautiful open spaces? Contact Parks Volunteer Coordinator Greg Reza at Greza@marincounty.org.
Natalie Agnew (San Anselmo), District 2 Intern, Board of Supervisors
Hannah Agren (Tiburon), Nutrition Wellness Program Intern, Health & Human Services (HHS)
Daniela Alvarado (San Rafael), School to Career High School Intern, Public Defender’s Office
Crystal Amezcue (San Rafael), Legal Support Intern, District Attorney’s Office
Eryka Bactad (South San Francisco), Collaborative Academic Practice Alliance (CAPA) Nursing Student, HHS
Tramanh Bui (Santa Ana), Nutrition Wellness Program Intern, HHS
Paul Comesanas (Windsor), CAPA Nursing Student, HHS
Vanessa Comins (Kentfield), School to Career High School Intern, Public Defender’s Office
Leah Contardi (Sebastopol), WIC Dietetic Intern, HHS
Zachary Farnkopf (San Anselmo), District 2 Intern, Board of Supervisors
Brittney Dominguez (Suisun City), Adult Probation Aide, Probation
John Donaghue (San Francisco), Design Consultant, Human Resources
Erin Edmunds (Berkeley), CAPA Nursing Student, HHS
Zachary Farnkopf (San Anselma), District 2 Intern, Board of Supervisors
Ella Foskett (Mill Valley), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff’s Office
Charles Fracchia (San Francisco), Financial Abuse Specialist Team (FAST) Volunteer, HHS