

## Hello Nature Friends,

Heidi and I have worked composing the Rattler together since 1998 and it is a labor of love for us.

Last December, the Rattler was 20 pages. This file was much too long and was deleted by many. We were horrified and it was requested we switch to a one-page format so people could easily read the Rattler on their phone. Even doing it monthly was sad and frustrating because we did not have enough room to cover all that was going on at the center.

We are trying a 4-page format now; we will not publish many photos because they take a long time to download. It might be too long for your phone but will be fine for your tablet. We are trying to fine-tune the Rattler to the new technology and find a happy balance for all; this is not an easy task!



### End of the School Year Party

Placerita has plenty of school groups visiting in June, but we have found that many docents take off on vacation early in the month. This is why we are going to have the “end of the school year party” on Saturday June 4th at Placerita at 6.00pm. Special recognition will be given to a few outstanding docents.

You know the rules: it is a pot luck dinner so please bring a large dish to share (those docents enjoy the good food!). You can even bring the recipe of what you made if you want to share your cooking secrets! PCNCA will handle the paper goods and the drinks.

It is a time to find out who the new board is and have fun with your docent friends before the quiet time of the summer so please, do not miss it. RuthAnne Murthy and Sue Wallander will host the party.



# The Rattler

Sponsored by the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates  
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**Placerita Canyon Nature Center**  
**Over 50 Years of Nature Education**

**May-June 2016**

**Open House** is almost here, and supplies for this great event are piling up in the docent room. To the great team in charge: Joan Fincutter, Andrea Donner and Sandra Balaram, we can't thank you enough!

However, the docents are the ones who make it all happen, and we have the greatest gratitude for all of you that make this fabulous event a reality. They all pitch in, signing up to be in charge of the different activities in the weeks ahead. Then they use their good will, ideas, and enthusiasm to bring fun and nature education to everyone who comes through our doors.

This day is a family tradition for many people who come each year; they came as children and are coming back with children of their own. It is a way for Placerita to give back and to thank the community for their support throughout the year. We are delighted to announce that Smoky the bear will pay us a visit!

### Twilight Hikes

This program is offered on the third Saturday of each month; these programs will begin at 7:00 pm and run for about an hour. Park staff and the Nature Center Docents split up with groups and take different courses through various areas of our facility, exploring the Heritage, Ecology, Hillside and Canyon Trails while discovering the night time sounds of the pond, the hoots of Great-horned owls and the ever hopeful look at our local Gray foxes and the occasional opossum and/or skunk.

These programs are extremely popular and we recommend that you come to the center 10 minutes before the start of the program to help with the planning of the different groups

### Open House Rummage Sale

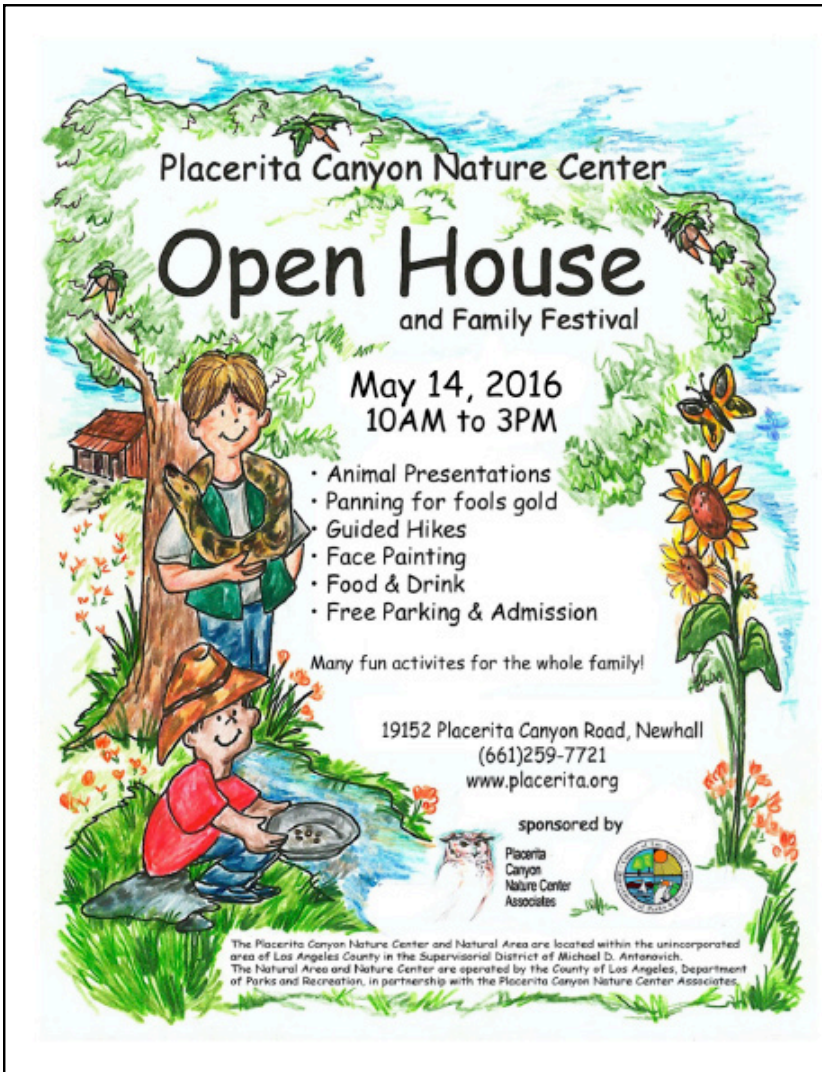
Teresa Jacobs and Jack Levenberg were in charge and they motivated all the docents to bring their gently used treasures to be sold during Open House. It is a lot of work to price all the items and to display them but the money earned from this project is 100% profit, so thank you Teresa and Jack for your time and effort.



### Denny Truger

Denny is a fantastic docent at Placerita and he also was nominated as Docent of the Month for April 2016 at Hart Park where he has been a volunteer for two and half years. He helped install the duck house, he is close to the donkey named Half Pint and he is involved with the on-going catalogue of the barnyard animals. Denny is always cheerful and helpful and we are so impressed by all his achievements.

**The Rattler is a bi-monthly publication sponsored by the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates to promote the preservation and enjoyment of the Placerita Canyon Natural Area. Please come, enjoy, learn...and volunteer.**



### Olivia Miseroy and Her Rattlesnake

The rattlesnake is almost ready to take place in the display in the exhibit. Olivia is a perfectionist and she still needs to do a light touchup to its eyes then it will be placed where it belongs. We can hardly wait to see the result!

Each taxidermy animal that Olivia had done has been a pleasure to see because every detail is perfect. We are so lucky to have Olivia using her talent to increase our collection.

### 40th Anniversary of the

#### Placerita History Mural Celebration

Monday, May 23rd and we are going to celebrate with Rudi Pavini who is a very interesting local artist. You have looked at his work on many occasions as he was one of the artists who worked on the Placerita history mural under the bridge.

He is going to recollect his memories from this time and explain how this work of art came to be. We hope many docents will be able to visit Placerita to celebrate this occasion. We know that you will enjoy listening to Rudi's recollections about Placerita. Plus, a light lunch will be served after the celebration.

### Good Luck Rachael!

Do you remember Rachael Komulainen? She was an enthusiastic County employee at Placerita, and then she went to Hart Park to be in charge of the farm animals. We would visit her from time to time and a bunch of Placerita docents comes faithfully every Tuesday to help her to take care of the animals.

We were very worried when a few weeks ago she drove herself to the ER with a terrible abdominal pain. After an emergency surgery, she finally went home but will need a few weeks of recovery at home where she has also many animals to take care of. Dear Rachael, we wish you the very best, take it easy and be well soon.



### Arbor Day

by Heidi Webber

Bill and I spent the day at Central Park with a table for Placerita to commemorate Arbor Day on April 16 and 17, 10am -5pm, almost non-stop talking to the public about the snakes and the Brazilian bird-eating tarantula we had with us, plus our upcoming Open House. Thanks Glenda Perl, Jack Levenberg, Rick and Linette Brammer, Andrea Donner and Sandra Balaram for the help! I think it is safe to say we saw 5000 people. And we go to do it again the next day! My back and throat are so sore...

### The Native Plant Nursery

Many oak trees are having a hard time with the severe drought that we have experienced during these last few years. Stressed by the lack of water, the beetles are infecting the trees and we are seeing an alarming number of oak trees dying.

Frank Hoffman and Marietta Ewing along with several student volunteers have been using the nursery to plant some acorns that are germinating. The saplings are being watched and we hope to be able to plant them in the fall. It is important to use local acorns to replenish the gene pool.

### Time to Vote!

Each year, half of the board members need to be voted for and the result of the election is announced at the end of the school year dinner when all the ballots are counted.

We want to thank Jim Crowley and Dan Kott for serving again this year as the "Election Committee." It can sometimes be stressful to count all those ballots at the last minute and we urge all docents to send their vote on time.

They had to be creative, to ask for advice and were able to propose new names to replace docents who did not want to run for the board again.

Thank you for all your work.





### Meet Erica de Poor

I was born in Budapest, Hungary, and grew up in Sicily, where I had the most wonderful childhood anyone can ask for. I left a country occupied by the Russians under communism for a better one in Sicily. My aunt had married a very well to do Sicilian and my mother thought it would be much better for me. She and my sister stayed behind. My grandmother of course was with me.

I went to Italian schools until High School. My mother and my sister escaped in 1956, (by then I had inherited a stepfather and a stepbrother and sister. Upon arrival, I put back in high school, could not go to college because I was missing the English language and American history; well flew through that in no time. Now I spoke Italian, Hungarian and English.

I married and life began. I had a beautiful daughter but the marriage ended. Now on my own landed jobs and went to school.

Got better and better meet lots of people....I make friends easy.

Had a lot of interesting jobs, Insurance mostly all the way up to Re-Insurance, then I switched gear and tried the Medical end, loved it and worked for a dermatologist.

Swimming has always been my passion and joined health clubs where I could use the pool. Married again for a marvelous 11 years until he died. Still miss him terribly.

But life goes on and I remarried again, going on our 12th year. We moved to Santa Clarita in 2005 and settled in Friendly Valley, I became a Security Guard there, worked at Walmart in their Cash Office, gave that up and retired. Took that time to enroll at COC for business

courses.

Never been to Placerita Nature Center until I saw the sign for Docent Training, well jumped on the wagon and here I am. I was introduced to all kind of wonders but I stuck with the animals, I can talk about them forever, that is my mission. Teach the younger generation about our fauna and how important it is in our world to properly maintain the balance,

I want to be able to learn the handling of the raptors, such awesome creatures.

I do theater, while in Friendly Valley I joined their Little Theater and have been performing for the last 9 years. We put a show on every year. I bowl twice a week. I love gardening, we have roses, fruit trees in our yard and a lot of other plants which I care for as often as possible.

I also edit our community magazine where I live once a Month

My daughter is an avid hiker, when she could not run anymore, she did the hiking loves it, trying to get her out here to hike our beautiful Santa Clarita area. All in due time.



### Woolly Blue Curls

by RuthAnne Murthy

One of Placerita Canyon's Superstars is in bloom now, Woolly Blue Curls. (*Trichostema lanatum*) It is sometimes called Romero because the leaves resemble rosemary. The small leaves are summer deciduous. It makes its home on dry Chaparral slopes, and even though it is a common plant, it is well loved for its fragrance and flamboyant flowers. The spectacular purple and blue blooms are in uneven tall spikes. The "wool" is often over 1/8th of an inch long. Each flower has 4 long stamens that attract pollinators. Early Californians made a liniment from the leaves to help heal bruises, and it was used as a disinfectant as well. It can be found on the Ecology Trail. Don't wait too long to see its splendor! They fade quickly as the heat increases.

### Great Team Spirit

What happens when you have a school presentation neatly planned, but there's a surprise appearance of another school bus carrying 93 more kids? RuthAnne Murthy, lead docent, handled the situation beautifully. More docents and county staff came to the rescue and everyone went home happy. You make us all so proud to belong to Placerita!

### News from the Beehive

by Sue Sutton



The old queen has flown. Long live the queen! She took off from our beehive with her swarm. The old queen left with about 60% of the bees in the apiary in order to establish a new colony somewhere else in Placerita. The beehive was getting too crowded and this is the way life goes on with a beehive. We wish them well.

In our apiary, a new queen has emerged from her beeswax cell and all is well. After her mating flight, the new queen has gotten right to work laying eggs. These rice grain sized eggs will be lovingly fed and tended by thousands of female worker bees and a new generation of bees will emerge in 21 days.

The public always gets a kick out of locating the queen with the blue dot on her back but that queen is in her new hive. Our new queen emerged without a telltale dot. We hope to have our apiarist, Chip Vannoy, put a fresh new dot on her so we, and our visitors, can have the fun of playing "I spy the queen". You have to admit it is very exciting!

The picnic tables on the outside of the building close to the exhaust tube used by the bees have been removed so there is no reason for our visitors to be hanging in this area. Planters with greenery have been installed to further prevent people to come too close and accidentally encountering the vigilant guard bees that patrol the hive entrance/exit.

### Placerita Programs

At Placerita there is a lot going on beside our core program of children's field trips to the center. A whole lot more! So let me tell you about one that has been going on for much longer than the 19 or so years I have been doing it.

Oftentimes for various reasons such as budget, school age or preference, a class is unable to come to Placerita, so we go to them! Bill and I did it alone for many years, but have developed a wonderful Outreach team over the last few years. We also do community events like the recent Arbor Day weekend at Central Park.

We take the raptors, reptiles, spiders and mammals that are available to schools throughout the Santa Clarita Valley. We have developed our 50-minute or so program over the years to reflect what the children have learned in school or simply give them the talk about conservation of our natural resources, habitat and how these wonderful creatures we are showing them fit into the equation.

Our favorites are the little guys. These pre-K, Kindergarten and First Graders are adorable. They have the best questions ever! Because of a short attention span, we often break these classes into a couple 30-minute sessions. And there is always the little girl who asks tearfully "Where is his mommy and daddy?"

Then there was the time that Owl Jr. started coughing and gagging and cast a pellet! You would have thought those kids struck gold! We left it to dry so they could dissect it later. Once Rick Brammer was showing one of the king snakes and it decided to latch on to his hand. As the blood dripped down his arm, it became a teaching moment: "See kids? This is why you don't pick up snakes in the wild." The kids absolutely love these things happening right in front of their noses, including the almost guaranteed mute that Wheelie casts!

So, yes, there is a whole lot going on at Placerita. Our off-site message is the same, just adjusted a bit for the classroom or event. If you think you would like to join our team, feel free to contact me. My email and phone numbers are on the roster.

Heidi Webber



## SPRING / SUMMER PROGRAMS

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>FAMILY NATURE WALK</b>   | Every Saturday from 11 to noon.<br>An easy 1-hour walk exploring the area's natural and cultural history.   |
| <b>ANIMAL PRESENTATION</b>  | Every Saturday from 1 to 2 pm.<br>See, learn and ask questions about live native animals of the area.   |
| <b>BIRD WALK</b>            | Second Saturday of the month from 8 to 10am. For all levels of birders. Bring binoculars, water and field guide.  |
| <b>BIRD WALK, CASTAIC</b>   | The Placerita Canyon Natural Area docents lead a monthly bird walk at <b>Castaic Lake Recreation Area</b> on the first Saturday of the month at 8:00AM.   |
| <b>BLOOMS OF THE SEASON</b> | Learn about native plants and what is blooming along the trails. Meet in the patio at 9:30 for a one-hour stroll on the fourth Saturday of every month. For more information about this free program, call 661.259.7721 or 259.7832.  |
| <b>NATURE EDUCATION</b>     | An exciting new program at Placerita in conjunction with the Community Hiking Club. Every 3rd Sunday of the month at 2pm the PCNCA and CHC will provide a free educational program open to the public. Changes may be made, so please the center at 661.259.7721 to verify.<br>May 15: The Santa Clara River hosted by the Friends of the Santa Clara River.,<br>June: Venomous Insects and Arachnids with Frank Hoffman and Brent Karhner. |
| <b>TWILIGHT HIKES</b>       | This program is offered on the 3rd Saturday of each month. This program begins at 7pm and runs for about an hour. Park staff and the Nature Center Docents split groups and courses through the different trails in the dark. Come howl at the moon--if there is one that night!  |
| <b>OPEN HOUSE</b>           | May 14 from 10am until 3pm. A wonderful family-oriented day.  |
| <b>MURAL CELEBRATION</b>    | May 23 come for a 40th anniversary celebration of the mural.  |
| <b>END OF YEAR POTLUCK</b>  | Saturday, June 4 at 6pm. A Potluck for all docents and their families to celebrate the end of another fantastic school year. (see article)  |

**For more information, please call 661.259.7721 or visit our website at [Placerita.org](http://Placerita.org).**

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