



The Rattler

Sponsored by the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates
19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall, CA 91321
www.placerita.org (661) 259-7721

Placerita Canyon Nature Center
Over 50 Years of Nature Education
November-December, 2016

Dear Nature Friends

The highlight of this Rattler are the two flyers that you are going to find a little further along. They are for the Holiday Craft Fair and the Docent Training. The Rattler used to have a much larger distribution to the general public, now it is sent only to the docents. This is why we are going to ask for your direct participation.

Print those flyers (or have them printed at no cost at the Nature Center) and take them to places where they have a chance to be read by the public. The more exposure they have, the better the result will be.

Bring them to your different clubs, your church, and answer questions if somebody asks you what that is all about. Believe it or not, many people in our valley are not aware of Placerita Nature Center and are delighted to find out about us. People move, children are born and suddenly they are ready for a change.

I stumbled upon such a flyer 30 years ago, the day before docent training started, and it changed my life forever...and for the better. I am sure you know all the joy that being a docent brought to you, so give other people a chance to become a docent too.

As for the Holiday Craft Fair, it is pure fun and the only fund raiser for the Center so let them know about it! People really like to share in the fun and start the holiday season with the scent of the branches and pine cones in their houses. It is the only place in this valley where you can make your own decorations with such an abundance of natural products.



Fire recovery Day September 10

Thanks to Jim Hazard for directing the Boy Scouts and scout leaders in cleaning out 1,000 feet of drainage ditch that course through the nature center area. Because of the Sand Fire it is vital we prepare for the winter rains and clear out the tributaries of Placerita Creek.

Thanks to Raymond Orloff for taking this photos and thanks to the volunteers from Hands On Santa Clarita, SCV Trail Users and Boy Scout Troop 502 who worked on the trails in the park.



Brown Bag Training

Our first Brown Bag Training was held on Monday, September 19th. Thanks to Teresa Jacobs for her Gift Shop Training, Sue Sutton for her fabulous lecture on bees, and to Andrea Donner and her "crew" for sharing the Nature Boxes. There was something for everybody.

Brown Bag Trainings will be held on the 4th Monday of the month excluding December. The purpose is to provide continuing education and to present opportunities for docents.

Save Monday, October 24th for a very special day. First, Ron Kraus will provide Fall Kick-off from 9:00- 10:30. He will share current information about the park and motivate us as he does so well. Then, from 10:30 - 12:00, Richard Halsey, the author of *Fire, Chaparral, and Survival in Southern California* will present information about fire recovery. That is certainly appropriate. Then, bring a lunch so you can enjoy the company of your fellow docents.

These days are for you! Please feel free to suggest a topic or volunteer to present an area of your interest. We need everyone to participate...and that means YOU



Amphitheater Story, Episode I

By Fred Seeley



Long, long ago, in a galaxy far, far away.... No, No, No! That's another story! How about - A long time ago, in the Placerita Canyon Natural Area, legend has it that a bunch of Eagle Scouts designed and built an amphitheater at the confluence of two nearby dry steam beds.

Everything seemed fine and the site was used for several events every year (including all Docent Training during reconstruction of the principle building) and was even recently repainted by a Scout Troop and the hardware was replaced and up-graded a few years ago. Then, during a Community Nature Education Series presentation on Wolves 3 years ago, it was pointed out by several mobility impaired people that the venue is not even close to being handicap accessible! In hindsight, I guess we shouldn't

have been shocked by that realization, but no one had ever seemed to even think about the subject. So we stopped using the venue for any public events.

Then two things happened, one very sad and one quite the opposite; our late, wonderful and thoughtful Paul Levine left the PCNCA a rather large sum of money to continue our good work at the Nature Center, and then, a few months later, we were pleasantly surprised to receive a large donation from a local family foundation specifically to make physical improvements to the Natural Area to better serve our community.

Now, with money in hand, the Board chose several projects to finance. One of those projects was to achieve ADA (Americans with Disability Act) code approved handicap access to the amphitheater. This project was also on our official Long Term Strategic Plan, and yours truly had volunteered to spearhead that objective. Receiving the funds sped up the objective, probably by many years.

My initial idea was to provide additional approved handicap parking in the nearest parking area to the amphitheater, at the same elevation as the amphitheater, and create a wheelchair approved pathway to an ADA approved bridge over the nearest ravine and then on to a path to the amphitheater. The costs of buying an approved prefabricated aluminum bridge and shipping it here were estimated for me by a bridge company's sales manager. I then put together a semi-formal proposal, with photos and specifications, and presented it, through Russ, to the County Parks and Recreation construction and ADA experts.

With Russ's coordination efforts, the appropriate County people soon visited Ron Kraus, Sue Sutton, Russ and me at the NC. We reviewed the proposal, walked the site, and discussed the "real world" complexity of dealing with permits, water runoff in mountain ravines, etc. Realizing that we already have one ADA/handicap accessible bridge on the property, it occurred to us that it might make more sense overall to relocate the amphitheater to an area already served by that bridge.

Once we walked down there and crossed the bridge we realized that there is a large already "disturbed" (as in not creating more "disturbed" ground in an official Natural Area) underutilized area that looks like it would be a great place for a new amphitheater. It even has a nice gentle slope so that people on the back rows would have better views of the presentation area. It is also near our future ADA compliant Braille Trail.

The County officials agreed to have the planning department get started on some initial concepts, initial budget estimates, etc. We are now awaiting that information. I'll keep you all posted...

Watch out for Wildlife

Frank Hoffman taped a short video for SCVTV explaining certain basic rules to observe while driving, to protect wildlife and yourself.

This is particularly important now, due to changes in wildlife habitat caused by the Sand Fire. More deer than usual have been seen crossing Placerita Canyon Road, so it is a good time to review a few precautions:

Be alert, sweep your eyes from side to side of the road, watch out and do not drive too fast. Leave enough space and time so that you are able to stop if a deer or other wildlife suddenly crosses the road in front of your car.

If you drive at night, be extra careful. From personal experience, I was once lucky to avoid hitting a deer, only because I saw the reflection of my car lights in the eye of a deer ready to cross the road.

If you hit wildlife, park on the side of the road and put your flashers on. Call Los Angeles County Animal Care and Control 661-257-3191 to let them know. Though we know you are concerned for their well-being, do not approach wildlife. They can kick, scratch and bite because they may be hurt and they are certainly afraid.

There is a sign along Placerita Canyon Road close to the Disney Ranch asking you to slow down for deer. There is a steady population in that park. Disney Ranch plants crops, and they water the grounds. The deer find food there so they cross the road day and night when you least expect them.

Be proactive and slow down, please. Nobody wants to hurt Bambi!





The Placerita Canyon Nature Center
Presents its Annual

Holiday Craft Fair

December 3 and 4, 2016

10:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.

at

Placerita Canyon Nature Center

19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall

1 1/2 miles east of the 14 freeway

Create and decorate your own holiday wreaths, centerpieces,
and ornaments using a large assortment of fresh-cut
greenery, pine cones and other beautiful natural treasures.

Please note that this is a fundraising event for the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates (a non-profit corporation) and that there is a charge for some activities. The charge for most crafts is \$2 and wreaths range from \$12 up. Cash and checks only, credit and debit cards cannot be accepted. For those with allergy concerns, please note that peanut butter is used on some craft items.

(661) 259-7721 • www.placerita.org



Volunteer-Naturalist Training Placerita Canyon Natural Area



Become a Volunteer-Naturalist!

- *Learn about the natural environment*
- *Teach children about nature*
- *Make a difference in your community*

No special background needed,
just a willingness to attend training and to volunteer at least twice a month.

Training Starts Tuesday, January 10th, 2017
Classes meet Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9AM to 12 Noon

Volunteer-Naturalists attend a 9-week training program. Topics include native plants, ecology, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, geology, history, and interpretive techniques. Instructors include noted professionals in the various fields. The cost of the training is \$45, which includes all training materials (instruction manual, field guide, T-shirt, and related items.) Minimum age for Volunteer-Naturalists is 18. Visit our website (placerita.org) for further information regarding the Volunteer-Naturalist program.

Other volunteer opportunities are also available at Placerita Canyon Natural Area that don't require the 9-week training program, such as office helper and trail maintenance team member. Bilingual (English/Spanish) volunteers are especially needed.

**For further information call or visit:
Placerita Canyon Natural Area
19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall CA 91321
(661) 259-7721**

Trail Treasures
by RuthAnne Murthy



Scrub Oak Gall on the Ecology Trail

Walking down the trails at Placerita Canyon one often sees odd-looking growths of the oak trees. These are oak galls or oak apples. They are the results of Cynipid wasps laying their eggs on the oak of choice. The wasps are quite particular, each wasp species favoring a particular oak species. After the eggs are laid, a plant hormone is injected into the tree that causes the trees to produce a protective structure around the developing larvae, somewhat like a scar. When the wasps are adults, they eat their way out of the gall making tiny exit holes in the gall.

Galls range in size from 1 mm to 6 cm. They vary in shapes and colors. Specific cynipid species lay their eggs on specific locations on the trees (leaves, stems, buds, roots, etc.) depending on the species. Some species of wasps produce two generations per year, a bisexual and an unisexual generation, each producing different types of galls on different parts of the tree. The adult wasps are generally about 1-4mm in size. At times other species of the Cynipidae family lay their eggs in the gall produced the original gall-former.

The parasitic galls do not harm or benefit the trees. After the adult wasps leave the gall, the gall dries up and falls from the tree. The wasps provide food for other insects that feed on the adults and their galls. Other plants, manzanita, for example, also produce galls.

Now you know all about these fascinating Trail Treasures.



Bill Sutton's Bench

Bill Sutton used to love to stand next to the bridge and to look at the peaceful landscape. Sue Sutton wanted to honor the memory of her husband by having a bench placed in this area.

After many months deciding what bench would fit nicely, the slab is being poured and the bench will be bolted to the slab on the other side of the bridge in the picnic area.

We do not want plaques distracting the visitors from their nature experience, so we do not accept plaques any place in the park. But for all who knew Bill, this bench will be Bill Sutton's bench forever.

Thank you Sue for this gentle reminder of Bill: he was lovely, funny, truly a great gentleman and also a terrific docent. We will never forget him.

WINTER PROGRAMS

FAMILY NATURE WALK

Every Saturday from 11 to noon.

An easy 1-hour walk exploring the area's natural and cultural history.

ANIMAL PRESENTATION

Every Saturday from 1 to 2 pm.

See, learn and ask questions about live native animals of the area.

BIRD WALK

Second Saturday of the month from 8 to 10am. For all levels of birders. Bring binoculars, water and field guide.

BIRD WALK, CASTAIC

The Placerita Canyon Natural Area docents lead a monthly bird walk at **Castaic Lake Recreation Area** on the first Saturday of the month at 8:00AM.

BLOOMS OF THE SEASON

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. Bring your camera and questions. For more information about this free program, call 661.259.7721 or 259.7832.

NATURE EDUCATION

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.

TWILIGHT HIKES

November 20 will be Movie Animals by Animal Tracks. There will be no December program.

This program is offered on the 3rd Saturday of each month. This program begins at 7:30pm 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!

November 19 and December 17. Call the center if weather is inclement to see if cancelled.

CRAFT FAIR

December 3&4 from 10am until 3pm. A wonderful family-oriented weekend. See Flyer

For more information, please call 661.259.7721 or visit our website at Placerita.org.



Holiday Craft Fair

I know Jill Goddard and Ron Kraus designed a beautiful flyer to explain the event, but each year when we ask the docents of that year to help with the craft fair, we always see this look of panic on their faces: "I have never been to a craft fair.

What happens there?" I will try to explain in a few words. It is the only fund raiser of the year but it is a lot of fun with only a gentle pressure to make a profit. The major attraction is the holiday decorations that the guests will make. Those who know about this great opportunity from previous years will be waiting at the door before we are open! The docent room will be filled with all kinds of branches,

seeds and pods and the smell is wonderful!

Wreaths, wood logs and ribbons are sold and people assemble all the greenery on those bases, with the help of glue guns. They make the most spectacular holiday decorations. People help each other and are very proud of their results; such a friendly cooperation is a true joy to see.

While the parents are busy, the children are having the time of their lives making special crafts involving glue, paint and sparkles! There is bird feeder pine cone making that is always a huge success. You roll a pine cone in a secret mixture of peanut butter that you then cover with bird seeds. People roll up their sleeves and enjoy the messy accomplishment.

Mari Carbajal very graciously accepted the management role for the craft fair again this year, and she has introduced many new ideas. Thank you so much Mari, it is a heavy load to take on your shoulders and we are grateful for your leadership.

Fred Seeley, one of the very active docents at Placerita, will be Santa again this year and we thank him in advance. Children can be a little shy at first when they see this tall Santa, but Fred has a lot of experience, as he used to be Santa for his company before his retirement. He is gentle and soft spoken and the candy canes in his bag make fear melt away.

Do not forget a visit to the totally renovated gift shop where you can finish your holiday shopping.

We hope all the docents will have a chance to help or to participate at the craft fair. It is a wonderful event where generation after generation gather and have the opportunity to start the holiday season in a real family atmosphere sharing happiness and joy.



Adopt-an-Animal Program

The Adopt-An-Animal Program began in 2006 as an effort to raise funds for the feeding and care of our live animals - from our tiny toads to our great horned owl, red-tailed hawk and turkey vulture. These animals are the "stars" of our nature center, and this adoption program is a wonderful way to support us. No, you can't take the animal home, but visitation is strongly encouraged!

Adoption packages range from \$25.00 to \$250.00 and include a certificate of appreciation, photograph and fact sheet of your animal, and recognition of your donation. Depending on the package chosen, you might receive a Placerita T-shirt, a private animal presentation and "behind the scenes" tour or personalized plaque of thanks.

Become that special guardian and adopt an animal for yourself. Adopt several! Use this program as a fundraiser for schools and scouts. These packages also make wonderful gifts for any occasion - birthdays, anniversaries or holidays. We can personalize your gift as you wish, include a message, wrap it, and send or deliver it. What could be easier...

Visit our website at www.placerita.org, call the nature center at (661) 259-7721 or pick up a brochure at the nature center for more details. You'll be glad you did!

Recognition Ceremony

Jim Crowley was honored Saturday, September 17 by Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich and county parks staff at the 2016 Docent & Volunteer Recognition ceremony held at the Eaton Canyon Nature Center. He was the volunteer of the year 2016 for Placerita Canyon Nature Center.

Also recognized from Placerita were Evelyne Vandersande, who received her 30-year docent badge; Will and Heidi Gray Webber, 20-year docent badges; and Charitha Eragoda, 5-year docent badge.

A graduate of the 2010 docent class, Crowley developed an appreciation for Placerita State Park 40 years ago and got involved after careers with Sears Roebuck and Lockheed Martin.

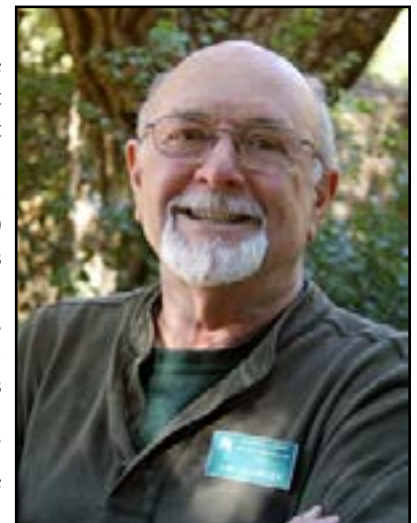
According to PCNCA board President Ron Kraus, Crowley has helped with docent training and encouraging the new docents for many years. He has



recruited new board members and is in charge of the voting process.

Said Crowley: "Teaching and learning about nature from kids and docents is the greatest reward."

Thanks you to Jack Levenberg, MC for the NCA meeting and the ceremony, Teresa Jacobs for the decoration and Lanita Algeyer for all the food planning.





Andrew Lasken

I grew up in the San Fernando Valley, the middle child of two teachers. In high school, when assigned our “What do you want to be” report, I did mine on being a rock star, apparently unaware of my slim prospects in that profession as a nerdy, unstylish introvert. In 2005, I received a Bachelor’s in Music Industry Studies from Cal State Northridge. I went on to work for a number of music publishing companies, where I specialized in royalties accounting, which is kind of like being a rock star, but with all the appealing qualities removed. I never felt totally fulfilled in these jobs, and in 2009 I decided to go back to school to get an elementary teaching credential. My timing couldn’t have been worse, as by the time I graduated, there was a surplus of teachers, with little job openings available for them. So without ever putting my credential to use, I ended up back in music publishing.

In 2015, my wife, Caitlin, received a generous inheritance from her grandfather. We felt undeserving of this money, and decided that the only way we could feel that it had been “earned” is if we put it to good use. I decided to quit my job and work towards causes that were important to me. By that time, Caitlin and I had become obsessed with animals, and she had begun a career in animal welfare advocacy.

I had always loved animals, but my passion was really kicked into high gear on a trip to British Columbia where I saw grizzly moms with their cubs in a remote part of the Great Bear Rainforest. Seeing wildlife in their authentic, natural settings is a profound experience, and one in which a Los Angelino like me is woefully under experienced. That is why programs like Placerita’s school tours are so important, because the truth is that Los Angeles is surrounded

by a great diversity of flora and fauna. I used to commute to work and pass by countless “trees” and “birds.” But once I realized that these generalized groupings actually comprised hundreds of different species, each with their own survival strategies and life histories, it was like I had added color to a black and white world in which I had been living for decades (Although I still have trouble identifying any tree that’s not an Oak or Sycamore).

In addition to being a docent at Placerita, I am a member of the Mountain Lion Enrichment Team at the Wildlife Waystation. One of my favorite hobbies is wildlife photography, which I try to use as a tool to foster appreciation of animals (You can find my Face book page under Andrew Lasken Photography). Many of my photos come from my other favorite hobby: traveling. Caitlin and I often base our vacation destinations on what animals we can see. Over the past few years, we have traveled to Tanzania, the Galapagos, Patagonia, and most recently, to see polar bears on the Hudson Bay.

Last year I got to live out my lifelong dream when I appeared as a contestant on Jeopardy! I came in second place, but I at least didn’t say anything stupid enough to become an Internet meme. I thought I could redeem myself at the Breakfast of Champions this year but... Maybe next year!

I currently live in Studio City, but I drive the 21 miles up to Placerita because I don’t think there’s any other program like it in the LA area. Not only is it a great experience for the kids, but I’ve learned so much from being a docent as well (not to mention I’ve made a lot of friends). And the more you learn about nature, the more fascinating it becomes. I never took a field trip to Placerita as a kid, but when I tell people I am a docent, they often tell me about the field trips that they took there, and they still have fond memories of those trips to this day. I recently found out that my grandmother once celebrated her birthday at Placerita! It is only my first year of docenting, but I hope that as I get better at it, I can help create a life-long love of nature, learning, and conservation.



News from the Gift Shop

The last few years have seen some major changes to the gift shop. Many docents donated many hours of time reconstructing the look and feel...now...

As we begin the new school season I am so excited about some other changes to the gift shop! We have new items and a great team. Joan Fincutter supplies the liquid and food products, Irene Heerlein schedules the coverage, I continue to provide training and overall accountability....

Please look at the overall gift shop layout!. You will notice that the items are easily seen, more inviting to the public and space used effectively. ...that would be in most part to Karen Gilbert (the newest member of the team). Karen has experience in sales and storefront decorating.. She and I have worked together the last few weeks (me mostly sitting and watching) and done some redistributing of gift shop items.

If you want to make any suggestions that would make the gift shop run more efficiently don’t hesitate to email or call one of us and have a great school year experience.....Teresa Jacobs.

Outreaches

You might not be aware that we have an outreach program that brings Nature Education to the schools and to many organizations who cannot visit the Nature Center. (Boys and Girls Club, Senior Center, Libraries, Schools, etc.).

For many months, the committee could not be active because new regulations came into effect.

We are delighted to report that the County has supplied us with the Certificate of Self Insurance which allows us to start the community outreach program once again.