



Hello Nature Friends

The end of the school year is coming, and you would think that the tempo would start to slow down at Placerita. But that's not the case at all, we are in the midst of big changes!

New ideas are being presented, and many new committees are formed. There is a wind of renewal, not so much about discarding old programs, but for improvements using new techniques and ideas.

We have a new president, and half of the board is starting a new contract. The docents from the class of 2019 are being very active and want new projects to get involved in. There is a lot of passion, enthusiasm and dedication all over. Placerita and the docents are really amazing!

Have a great summer, but do not disappear. Even on those hot days, Placerita will always provide an interesting visit and challenge..



The Rattler

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

June-July 2019

Editor: Evelyn Vandersande Publisher: Heidi Webber

Denny Truger -Docent of the Year for Placerita

by Evelyn Vandersande.

*This article was published on SCVNews by
Leon Worden on June 6th.*

We are delighted to announce that Denny Truger was voted Docent of the Year for Placerita Canyon Nature Center. He will receive his diploma at the Recognition Award Ceremony at Eaton Canyon Nature Center on September 14. Congratulations, Denny!!!!

Denny became a docent in 2012, he retired shortly before and had never been to the Nature Center. He took the docent training class after noticing the ad in the local newspaper, and it was a perfect fit for him.

His smile, great sense of humor, his joy in every project he tackles, has made him a fantastic asset to the Nature Center.

He is very technically minded and see new ways to solve problems: bringing electricity to the amphitheater, repairing the public address system, and many other projects. His pride and joy was to completely rebuild the Tataviam exhibit. Denny is an artist and he brings his good design eye to all of the many projects he does: building a fountain for the hummingbird garden or being part of the team who made a wooden cow for our Open House!

Denny is also a volunteer at Friends of Hart Park and Museum, and helps to clean up the animals at Hart Park. Denny is an avid hiker who can often be seen with his Placerita friends hiking the PCT or the desert.

Denny was born in San Francisco and raised in Glendale. He went to Pierce College and followed his maternal Grandfather, Uncle, Father and brother to become an electrician. He has been very happy with this choice. His love of Nature started while growing up when he went on summer vacations to Idaho to visit his paternal grandparents. Those were the best times of his life. His grandfather was a hard-rock gold and silver miner who was always sure that gold was just one more blast away. His grandmother was the best cook and loved all animals. Denny and his brother were always hiking, feeding the squirrels, chipmunks, birds, chickens and porcupines, along with playing with the mining equipment. Great times!

Most of all, Denny is a wonderful person, with a heart of gold, a quick and easy smile who makes everybody have a great time in his company. He is also a very hard worker and Placerita Canyon Nature Center has benefited tremendously from all his wonderful projects.

Being the Docent of the Year is the highest distinction given by the Nature Center and we are so happy that Denny Truger has been recognized this way. Congratulations again Denny and thank you for all you do, always with this winning smile of yours!





What is Going on in the Cabin?

by Herb Broutt.

You have heard before that the back door was replaced. Then an exterminator did some improvements to get rid of the rodents, which generated a major clean up. Denny Truger climbed on the roof to install a grate to prevent any creatures from finding their way inside. The docents have been asked to keep the doors closed at all times when the cabin is not in use.

The rodents fight is a long battle!

RuthAnne Murphy applied for a grant for \$4,000 from the Sons of the Golden West and it was approved! The money will be used for repairs to the Walker Cabin, such as fixing the gap between the chimney and sidewall. We will be replacing the curtains and quilt. Also, the grant organization will put up a bronze plaque with text and braille to replace the existing wooden sign using the same text. Congratulations to RuthAnne for winning the grant!

The back door was painted by Carolyn Neu Odien to match the walls. Thank you to Fred Seeley for finding the artist.

We have tentatively set the date for the Walker Cabin Centennial Celebration on October 24, 2020! You are going to hear more about the celebration in the coming months....



A Visit to Whittier Narrows Nature Center

Saturday, May 18th,

Docent Enrichment was held at Whittier Narrows Natural Area. We were happy that some of our docents who still work could join us. We learned a lot about what other parks are doing as we attended a Nature Center Associates meeting.

After the meeting, we were treated to a delicious lunch. The highlight was a hike through the park where we saw some familiar plants and animals and learned about some new to us. What a great day!

Trail Treasures

By RuthAnne Murthy

Cobweb thistle, also known as western thistle, is one of two California native thistles in Placerita Canyon. The other is California thistle. Cobweb thistle is part of the sunflower family. It is a 2-8 foot tall biennial, meaning it lives for 2 years. Young cobweb thistles have whitish stems that mature to pale green. The whole plant is covered with white cottony hairs that can irritate skin.

The leaves are arranged alternately and have spines on the ends. The leaves are up to 12 inches long and are lance-shaped. The leaves are covered with prickly hairs.



Cobweb Thistle
Cirsium occidentale

Even though cobweb thistle is part of the sunflower family, it only has disk flowers. There are no ray flowers, also known as petals. The flowers are a purple-tinged red. They grow solitarily on long, somewhat leafy stems. The flowers are covered with white or pale pink bristles that look like spider webs, thus its name. The sepals dry to sharp thorns. They bloom from May to July.

There is currently a fine specimen between the plant nursery and the hummingbird garden. Be sure to stop and admire this lovely Trail Treasure.



Big Change at the Acorn Amphitheater

By Jack Levenberg

It all started because our old amphitheater was not ADA approved, so we built a beautiful and spacious new amphitheater in accordance with the ADA rules.

On June 4th, the bulldozer sprang into action to prepare the ground for 2 new concrete pads to be built, to accommodate more ADA-compliant picnic tables. The tables have been ordered and should be installed by the end of July. At that point the amphitheater will be ADA certified for all performances. Trees have been planted which should provide nice shade in the future.

We are going to have a "try out" session on July 13 - just for docents and their families - to check out the screen, projector, and sound system. Little bit by little bit, this dream is becoming a great reality.



Much About Bees

You might have noticed a lot of activity in the beehive in the classroom. We have a new queen bee flowed to us from Hawaii and many new worker bees were introduced in the beehive. If you look carefully, you will notice a red dot marked on the queen so you can notice her more easily (she is also the largest one).

Thanks again to Bennett's Honey farm who always helps us setting up the bees and gives us the most detailed instructions. You can visit their store and tasting room on Highway 126, before Fillmore. (3176 Honey Lane, Fillmore)

While we are on the topic of bees, you might be interested in going to the Honey Festival in Fillmore on June 22 and 23. Placerita Canyon will be there both days with an outreach and you can visit them in Central Park in Fillmore.



Thank You Olivia Miseroy

Olivia is a very talented taxidermist who is responsible for many of the taxidermy at Placerita. She attends competitions all over the world, and gets full recognition for her talent and artistic ability.

She also has ways to get different animal skins for her projects, so Denny Truger was delighted and very grateful when she gave him remnants of deer skin for the Tataviam Hut. The rabbit skins we had there were looking rather sad after the winter rains. Denny, who also has a good eye for design, made a great display. Come and have a look.



Outreach for Two Days

Whew! It was a busy weekend for the Placerita Canyon Nature Center, at the annual Arbor Day/Earth Day festival at Central Park. For the Wildlife ambassadors, they shared Milky Way (a California king snake), Penelope (a gopher snake), and Sprinkles (a Brazilian bird-eating spider - a tarantula, actually). Kudos to Heidi Gray Webber and Will Webber, Glenda Perl and Rick Brammer. They entertained almost 2000 visitors over BOTH DAYS!!!

The butterfly hats designed by Jill Goddard get compliments every time Glenda wears her hat!

Thank you for doing such great Nature Education at this event, year after year.



Nature Boxes on the patio

by Dave Taylor

The summer used to be a little bit too quiet at Placerita. That changed tremendously last summer, when Dave Taylor took action and decided to start a program showing the Nature Boxes on the patio for all the visitors. All the docents were very enthusiastic about this idea that would enable them to see their friends, do Nature Education during the summer mornings, and have a great time. The word spread with the visitors. Many families showed up on a regular basis with their children. It can be a long summer, but suddenly they had a place to visit in the morning and so many fun facts to learn from each box. The patio is shady, so it rarely gets too hot - but if it does, the boxes are set up inside the interpretive center instead, giving everybody another opportunity to learn and see the displays.

Thank you to Dave Taylor, who will show up faithfully on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and to Brian Broders who will take the shift on Tuesdays and Saturdays. A big thank you to all the docents who come to participate in this program.

Last year, everyone had a great time getting to know one another - new and senior docents - and visiting with park visitors. When there is time, several docents will bring out snakes to add to the program.

The Nature Box program will start on June 18 and end on August 10, running from 9AM to 12 noon. Tell your friends, and thank you for your support and your efforts.

A NEW EDUCATION COMMITTEE

By Cindy Gold

As PCNC docents there are two things we have in common - we love nature and we love sharing nature with others. This might involve leading school hikes and outreach programs, showing and caring for our animals and plants, learning more about our environment, and modeling a sense of awe and respect for nature.

As a way to maintain and enhance existing activities, and create new ways of sharing our passion, we've formed an Education Committee. At our first meeting we developed a list of ideas and a list of all current programs. During our next meetings we'll decide on which ideas we'd like to work on, develop a streamlined process for discussing and implementing change, and get to work.

All ideas and positive energy are welcome!

**Erica Andrassy-de Poor
is In Charge of the Awards**

Lanita Algeyer had been responsible for award selection for many years, and we thank her for her dedication. Erica is now taking over the task of determining who will receive an award at the “end of the school year” party and Holiday dinner.

Erica is a board member, and did receive suggestions and support from the board. It is a fun responsibility, but it is not always easy to make the decisions because we have such an enormous group of fantastic docents at Placerita.

Thank you, Erica, for stepping up to the plate.

Electricity Will be Installed to the Amphitheater Very Soon

by Denny Truger

By mid June, you'll be seeing some construction in our dirt parking lot by the creek. It's been about a year since Fred Seely and myself started on a journey to provide electricity to the amphitheater. At the end of May 2019, the journey ended when I picked up the final electrical permit from LA County so we can start work.

There'll be a two foot deep trench about 600' long from the Nature Center to the North side of bridge. Depending on inspections, the construction could take as long as two weeks.

We hope we will be able to start some program requiring electricity this summer : concerts, movies...the sky is the limit!



**Our Annual Bus Trip
by RuthAnne Murthy**

Save this date!! Our annual bus trip will take us to Mt. Wilson Observatory on Monday, July 22nd. We will have a private docent tour, and then we will find a place to eat lunch. A big thanks to County Super Kathryn Barger who is proving our bus. Docents/Volunteers will get the first opportunity to sign-up, and then, if space, you will be able to invite a guest. It will be an interesting day, for sure!



iNaturalist and Docent Enrichment

Every month, the docents review their knowledge under the guidance of RuthAnne Murthy and many other experts, who help make this once a month training so very interesting.

In April the docents became familiar with the app iNaturalist. This enables them to send many photos taken in Placerita, to participate in the City Wide Challenge and to enter the competition with the other Nature Centers.

We went on the trail and took many photos of the wildflowers in bloom at this time. The City Wide Challenge took place from April 26 to 29, but this app gives you great tools to be able to identify and get feedback from many experts.

It was a beautiful morning with a large enthusiastic group, eager to learn this new tool. There was some problems downloading all the photos we wanted from our phone, some docents did it from their computers but we all gave it a try. Kim Bosell invited all PCNCA members to the Bio Blitz Award Ceremony on June 19th to give the results of the competition.

Breakfast of the Champions –August 17

What is that? It is a clever way for Ron Kraus to force the docents to review and sharpen their knowledge before our fall kickoff. As usual, good times start with food, so we will have a great pot luck brunch.

Then we start the game that can be compared to “Are you smarter than a fifth grader?” The great twist is that all the questions are carefully researched by Ron and are linked to Placerita...and that is how we all become experts! Botany, critters, history, even math! The docents are split into teams, and the competition is fierce but also lots of fun.

Jill Goddard makes special caps designed for the winning team. They are works of art, with a paper mâché animal on the cap, and Jill spends many hours getting the perfect look. Those caps become prized possessions, and people keep on wearing them for years to come.

Thank you so much Ron for keeping up this great tradition. We all know how much preparation that demands, and we are grateful for all the work from both you and Jill.



It is an Interpretive Center!

It's official. Our Nature Museum is now an Interpretive Center. The signs are up. A mistake was made at the opening of our new facility, and it took a few years to correct it. But Denny Truger took the matter in his hands, and had a new sign made. He kept going with new signs on: Riparian, Oak Woodlands and Chaparral in the Interpretive Center, and the hours the Center is open. Thank you Denny!





End of the School Year Party

We still have plenty of school groups coming to Placerita in June, but we try to gather all the docents before they escape for their summer vacations. The set-up crew did a fantastic job for the party, putting on a Western theme with costumes to try on --we all took fun photos and had a great time.

Thank you goes to Linette Brammer who is in charge, with help from Lori Wolfe, Mara Cohen, Jackie Thomason, Sue Wallander and Annette Uthe.

Erica Andrassy recently accepted the job of giving the awards, and did a lovely job with some help from Teresa Jacobs. Thank you to Lanita Algeyer who did the awards duty for many years.

Here were the award recipients: Rose Krueger does a lot of work in the background. She prepares the rats for feeding, weighs food because each bird, snake, and mammal gets a different amount; she also cleans the hoods and enclosures, every task done with a smile. This is a great

help to Marietta! Barbara Wyrozumski was able to pick up the training from the gift shop very efficiently. Glenda Perl works long hours in the gift shop and is always very helpful. Brian Broders helps on the school programs with gusto.

A special thank you and gift certificate was given to Ron Kraus, PCNCA president for the last 4 years. It would be very difficult to thank Ron properly for all he's done and will do for PCNCA, but we want him to know how grateful we are.

Vicki Cunningham announced the result of the vote for the board members. Thank you to the voting committee for all the help: Vicki, Jim Crowley, Mara Cohen and Jackie Thomason. This takes time and we appreciate your efforts. Vicki hid the list of the new board members under her cowboy hat, a nice touch in keeping with the evening theme!

Here is the whole list of all the directors so nobody will get confused.

Board Officers – 1 Year Term (Through May 2020)

President -- Fred Seeley

Vice President – RuthAnne Murthy

Chapter Secretary (Also called “Recording Secretary” in the By-Laws) –Cindy Gold

Treasurer – Rick Brammer

Corresponding Secretary – Herb Broutt

NCA Rep – Joan Fincutter (This is a Board Appointment, not an Officer, per the By-Laws)

Directors Elected June 2019 -- 2 year term (through May 2021)

Erica dePoo, Joan Fincutter, Gary Freiburger, Cindy Gold, Sue Sutton, Denny Truger

Directors Elected June 2018 -- 2 year term (through May 2020)

Rick Brammer, Herb Broutt, Jack Levenberg, RuthAnne Murthy, Fred Seeley, Bill Webber.

Alternate Directors Elected June 2019 – 1 year term (through May 2020)

Alternate No. 1: Chuck Lingo Alternate No. 2: Carole Frocillo

Past President – 1 year term (through May 2020) Ron Kraus

We all know that you all have the best interests of PCNCA at heart and that you will bring many great changes and improvements to Placerita.

It was a very fun evening with super great people...Placerita is definitely a very special place.



Jessica West and Apollo

I'm sure that whoever the first person who said that beauty is only skin deep, or that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, wasn't referring to turkey vultures - but they should have considered them.

I met Apollo (named because she was originally assumed to be a male) 10 years ago when she arrived at the Placerita Nature Center in a state of disarray. She was non-releasable after having received a wing injury from a car strike when she was young. She hadn't been handled much, and could - and very much did - bite at everyone, including any conveniently located nearby legs. But over the course of a decade, she blossomed into an amazing ambassador for her species (with @davidstives to thank for his tireless efforts).

I had no intention of becoming attached to a vulture - with that featherless head, those chicken feet, and breath that could keel over a horse. How could someone ever love such a thing? But over those 10 years, we found ourselves infatuated with this bizarre bird.

Apollo was incredibly intelligent. She could decipher puzzle feeders, learned to follow us on walks, and was insatiably curious about anything and everything. She was constantly testing materials, fabrics, and items gently (and sometimes not so gently) with her beak. She could eat anything, and almost never hesitated to do so (including some moldy bread that was accidentally left out once). But hey, when you have a gut built for devouring the deceased, why not?



But most of all, she was enduringly social. She'd often wander around with us and, once she started to trust us, would flap her wings excitedly and bow her head in greeting. She even went so far as to display courtship behavior to us. You'd look down at your feet, and there would be Apollo pulling at your shoelaces.

After I left the Nature Center, I tried to visit when I could. She even made an appearance at my wedding in 2017. This is something I am, especially now, very grateful for. After I learned of her passing, I sat back for a moment, somber. She hadn't just been a bird I worked with. She was like a coworker, with incredible personality that most folks assumed she lacked based on her outward appearance. Apollo, most sincerely, changed my life. Like her namesake, she truly did bring light into the world.



Fly High Girl!

By Frank Hoffman

In mid-April, Marietta noticed that Apollo pulled a very large patch of feathers from her chest and that her crop was bright red and fully distended. Originally we believed she was doing this as a normal part of (female) bird behavior that can occur this time of year in an effort to create a "brood patch" for brooding eggs. She had never laid eggs before, but it's not unusual and they can and will if Mother Nature is so inclined; even if the eggs would be unviable.

It looked bad to both of us, so I immediately rushed her to the Ojai Raptor Center in an effort to find out exactly what was happening. It was immediately suggested that she likely had something stuck in her throat that created an impacted crop and that she needed medical attention to clear it right away (crop stasis). No one knows today, or will ever know exactly, what caused the blockage but it was definitely serious and necessitated surgery as soon as possible. The vet was called to perform that procedure, and it was underway when she passed during the surgery.

Apollo will be greatly missed but did live a long 21 years in captivity. She was originally deemed un-releasable due to an incident with an automobile, which left her incapable of full flight and the soaring capacity a vulture truly needs to survive in the wild. She lived here at Placerita for nearly 11 years, and did allow us the opportunity to educate many of our visiting park patrons about turkey vultures, so she was definitely invaluable in that regard as an Educational Ambassador for our Natural Area.



Open House

By Heidi Webber

As I heard rain on my gazebo roof the night of May 10-11, I smiled in my sleep. On the other hand, I worried about how this beautiful spring rain would affect the planned Open House at Placerita Canyon Nature Center that day. We usually can expect several hundred families coming to see and experience all things nature and wonderful to the Santa Clarita Valley.

This is Placerita's annual Thank You to the SCV for their patronage and support from the preceding year. A spring-time date is always iffy and we have had years with mist and drizzle.

This year it was wonderful! Everyone woke up to clearing skies and a crisp morning that eventually warmed to a sunny 80-degree day. And the crowds came! All day the park was filled with the happy chatter and laughter of children of all ages as they made butter, found out how to make sauerkraut, scrub clothes on a washboard, wring them out and hang on a line. Not a washer or dryer in sight!

There was a Treasure Hunt, corn husk dolls and button badges were made, snakes from the Herpetology Society were held and petted, the wheel was spun for prizes from the Sierra Pelona Rock Club and geodes or thunder eggs were bought and cut to disclose the beautiful interiors. The Sierra Club was also in attendance. For a treat, Kona Ice was selling cups of their flavorful frozen treats. Roger McClure led a hike and there was a morning animal show in the Acorn Amphitheatre. The band Bacarrado played in the amphitheater in the afternoon.

The lines were long for Jill Goddard's caricature drawings, and gold panning with Bill Webber, Charitha Eragoda and Sara Vincelli.

Denny Truger cut out a crazy wooden cow that Jill Goddard designed and painted and with a slightly anatomically correct udder so the kids could "milk" her. Andrea Donner and her crew set out the nature boxes to the delight of everyone who passed by. And Smokey the Bear made an appearance!

Linette Brammer had the kitchen well under control. For the docents and volunteers the PNC provided sandwiches for lunch and side dishes were brought in by the docents. Lots of coffee, tea, bagels and sweetbreads were around for breakfast and snacking.

It was such a wonderful day and the culmination of a lot of work once again for Joan Fincutter, Sandra Balaram and Andrea Donner and all the docents who helped. Another highly successful Open House. Thank You!



SUMMER 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.

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

Every 3rd Sunday of the month at 2pm the PCNCA will provide a free educational program open to the public. Changes may be made, so please the center at 661.259.7721 to verify. June is "Search and Rescue coordinated by Frank Hoffman. July is a "Cool Travel" presentation by Nikki Dail. August is "Desert Fascinations" presented by Linda Castro and organized by Helen Sweetney.

TWILIGHT HIKES

This program is offered on the 3rd Saturday of each month. This program begins at 8pm and runs for about an hour. Park staff and the Nature Center Docents split groups and courses through the different trails in the dark. June, July and August will start at 8.00pm.

PLACERITA NATURE TOTS

Every 2nd Saturday of the month. Age 3-5 and one adult companion for each child. Saturday from 9.30 to 10.30. Registration open the 1st of each month, program limited to 15 children. Register at nature_tots@placerita.org

BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS

Saturday, August 17. See article

MOUNT WILSON

Monday, July 22nd. See article

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