

The Rattler

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

September-October 2020

Editor: Evelyn Vandersande Publisher: Heidi Webber

Hello Nature Friends

Some things remain the same, the temperature is in the triple digits so I am sure it seems too early to think about fall.

The Western Tanager has been spotted in its southward migration, the male Hooded Orioles (another beautiful bird) will depart in the beginning of September. The turkey vultures that migrate will do so by the third week of September, like clockwork. The leaves of the poison oak are starting to turn red and you can find some acorns on the ground. Suddenly you notice more Dark-eyed Juncos than a month ago. One wonderful bit of news is that the Canyon Trail is officially open, after being closed for 4 years!

However, something is off. We did not get together for the Breakfast of the Champions, no enrichment field trip, no Great American Camp-out, no Recognition Event at Eaton Canyon, no Fall kickoff to brush up on our knowledge, no Walker Cabin Centennial celebration, no getting together at all because of the restrictions of Covid-19. We miss each other but, please do not give up on PCNCA. The board meetings take place on the first Tuesday of the month by Zoom at noon. That can be a way to see the familiar faces and to learn what is being planned. The trails are open for hiking, please respect the 6 feet distancing and wear a mask if you cannot. Do not gather in large groups. The Nature Center is open from 7am to 7pm, Wednesday to Sunday. Give it a try and come to check how Fall comes slowly to California.



New Rules for the Docents and Volunteers at Placerita Canyon Nature Center During the Pandemic

by Russ Kimura, Regional Park Superintendent 1

Though the park is open for trail use, Placerita Canyon Nature Center is still closed for any usage of indoor venues including the Walker Cabin, gift shop, Center building, etc.

Only 4 volunteers are allowed into the park at the same time. This number includes both indoor and outdoor docent activity. We are not allowed to have any programming or meetings of any kind – even in the amphitheater or at the picnic tables. Also, the department is requiring facial masks and social distancing of 6 feet at all times for staff, volunteers and the public.

Another park was already closed due to a park staff member, volunteer, visitor or contractor testing positive. I know it's hard not to physically see our much-loved staff and volunteers in person, but I would recommend using ZOOM or Microsoft Meetings for rallying the troops and maintaining contact with

our wonderful group of volunteers.

PCNCA and NCA have done a great job of having all their meetings on ZOOM. I would gladly participate in your ZOOM meeting with all the volunteer members, to explain the status of the COVID-19 pandemic impact on Placerita Canyon Nature Center.

Thank you, Russ

Goodbye Marietta

Because of budget challenges, the part time positions have been eliminated from the parks. The only part time employee at Placerita was Marietta Ewing, and she had to be let go.

Marietta is a hard worker who was in charge of the animal care: feeding them, taking their weight and making sure that all the supplies were ready and given on time so the animals would have the best of care. The animals won't suffer because 2 people stepped up to cover her shifts: Dave Stives, Park Animal keeper and Frank Hoffman, Recreation Services Supervisor. Placerita being closed on Monday and Tuesday requires us to be creative, because the animals need supervision and care every day.

We miss Marietta and we sure hope that when the next budget comes out, her position will be reinstated. She comes to the office from time to time to visit the employees and the animals, of course, so we have the pleasure not to lose touch.

All of best of luck Marietta!





The Canyon Trail is Fixed!

By Ron Kraus

Placerita's most popular trail—the Canyon Trail—has been closed for 4 years due to extensive damage from the Sand Fire in 2016 and the subsequent rock slides, flooding and debris flows. It's been a long and difficult process to repair the trail. Many issues had to be resolved involving funding, environmental approvals, permitting and contracting the labor for the restoration work.

Your PCNCA Board of Directors was actively involved in trying to move the process along and had numerous meetings with the various County Parks agencies associated with the project. Since large portions of the old trail were totally obliterated, several alternatives were considered as to where the replacement route would be located and how it would be built.

After all the planning and other administrative steps were completed, the California Conservation Corps was hired to do the work. The CCC crew worked hard to remove debris, cut brush and rebuild the trail. In addition, a new stream crossing was constructed, a retaining wall was built, and new benches were installed. The County Trail Crew also helped with the restoration, installing new pinch points to slow down bikers, new split rail fencing and a plank covering over the oil seep crossing.

In my opinion, the newly restored trail is even better than the old one. It follows the stream through the beautiful riparian habitat lined with willows and mule fat (and poison oak.) So...when you have a chance, check it out. The wait was worth it!



Wasp Trap

It has been very hot lately, and all the animals are looking for food and water to survive. Wasps are no exception, and we had problems with the food for the animals on the patio because the wasps were attacking the food as soon it was out, putting the birds of prey at risk. The wasp traps have been very effective, and are controlling the situation. All is well and the wasps can go somewhere else!

Placerita Youth Volunteers of the Year 2020

Hey there folks,

It is with great pleasure that I am able to nominate as Placerita's 2020 Youth Volunteers of the Year, Lilliana Jade Hon and her younger sister, Sophia Belle Hon.

Both started here more than a year ago as National Honor Society Candidates. As part of that program, they must complete at least 10 Community Service Hours and maintain at least a 3.5 GPA in school (B+) for that entire semester to accomplish that goal. Both nailed it and are still here today! On and off for the past year, in between school and other family responsibilities and outside obligations, they have been able to do just about anything and everything I have asked of them (except the rats). They have always completed their assignments very quickly, commonly coming in to ask for more when finished. Sometimes it is hard to keep up with them and find more for them to do!

Before (and now after) the park shut down for volunteerism due to the COVID-19 Virus, they have contributed immensely to the care and husbandry of many of our wild animals, completing such tasks as food/diet preparation, the cleaning of their enclosures and crates and contributing to their overall health and well-being by accomplishing this work.

In my opinion, both work very hard at assignments given them here at our Center. They are incredibly friendly and helpful, are quick learners, self-motivated, meticulous in their attention to detail, generous with their time, as well as being kind to other volunteers, visiting park guests and park staff. They work with minimal instruction after they have been taught something just once. They have helped in the docent Gift Shop and have helped with numerous other projects here that have included light building maintenance, grounds maintenance and light office/clerical work.

With these responsibilities and all others, they have always met their deadlines and have exceeded my expectations in most ways possible. I am very happy to call them our friends! Respectfully submitted,

Frank Hoffman
Recreation Services Supervisor,
Placerita Canyon Natural Area



Thank You Kathy Hovore

The Nature Center is closed, and it is not always easy to give recognition to the docents who come to help. Kathy Hovore has been coming twice a week to water the plants on the patio and in the Hummingbird Garden. This is what the patio looks like after a week of 109 degrees! Not bad at all and very green.

Thank you so much Kathy Hovore for this great work, we all appreciate it.



Recognition Event

Every year in mid-September, the docents and volunteers from Placerita Canyon Nature Center are invited to join members from the other Nature Centers at the Annual Recognition and General Meeting, held at Eaton Canyon Nature Center. Last year, we were honored by the presence of Kathryn Barger, Supervisor 5th District and Kevin Reagan, Deputy Director Regional Agencies.

As you can well imagine, it is a special event that takes months to prepare, and when all the restrictions became needed because of Covid-19, it became quite clear that the event had to be cancelled.

It is a sad situation because it is the time when the docent of the year for Placerita, Robert Grzesiak, would have received special recognition and a beautiful scroll.

This is also the time where the docents who with 5, 10 and 15 years of service for Placerita receive a gold name tag. It is usually a rather moving part of the ceremony, with official photos and handshakes.

Though we are not able to get together this year, we extend congratulations to all. We thank you for your dedication and love for Placerita. We appreciate all of you greatly, and you will receive your name tags very soon!

Five Years:

Erica de Poor
Sandra Cattell
Mark Hershey
Kathie Hovore
Koreen O'Connell
Glenda Perl
Robert Starks

Ten Years:

Marc Alva
Sandra Balaram
Ingrid Brown
Maria Elena Christensen
Jim Crowley
Joan Fincutter
Teresa Jacobs
Kathryn Kazmer
Dan Kott
Jack Levenberg
Don Regis

Fifteen Years:

Rosemarie Regis



The Birds are Back

For a few years, the birds that are kept at the Nature Center could not be shown to the public because of the Newcastle disease. It is thought that this disease was associated with poor hygiene of birds used for cock fights. This disease spread through the bird population, and it was important to keep our birds away from the public during those few long years.

Fish and Wildlife finally gave us permission to show our birds and assured us that Newcastle disease had been eradicated. Jack Levenberg is the bird handler for Sierra, our great horned owl at Placerita. When he received the phone call from Frank Hoffman, recreation Services Supervisor at Placerita that he could come again to handle Sierra, tears of joy came to his eyes. He was so excited to be able to do that again after such a long wait.

Bird handlers and their birds spend many hours together and develop a deep and special bond. Each bird handler handles only one bird because they have learned to anticipate special behavior, they know how to handle stress in their bird, as well as the bird's preferences, and they work together as a team. Of course, one of the great pleasures is to show the bird to the public, educate and explain the characteristics and specific behavior. Alas, this is not possible at present. Though the birds do not have to fear the Newcastle disease, now the humans must be concerned about Covid-19. The handlers cannot not approach any members of the public, and the buildings are closed.



Work to be Done

by Denny Truger

During the last few months, I have been doing maintenance work on some of the Nature Center's exhibits. Unfortunately, the Hummingbird Garden fountain pump finally gave up. I had been keeping it going, but finally I had to purchase a new pump. It should be installed by the first week in September.

Also, the Butterfly Pond's float valve needed adjustment, and it should now be working properly. Unfortunately, someone has been turning off the water to the pond, which during this heatwave has caused the pond to dry up several times.

If you see a problem with the pond, please let the County employees know. I am currently working on installing the Butterfly Garden's informational kiosk. That should be installed, along with refreshing the Tataviam exhibit, when this heatwave ends. This may seem like a lot of work, but I enjoy doing it and I also enjoy my Placerita family.

Thank you, Denny! It is nice to see you are holding down the fort, and keeping things in good shape.



News from Placerita Canyon Nature Tots

by Andrea Donner.

Despite the pandemic, and the fact that all the school programs have been cancelled, Placerita Canyon Nature Tots is still going strong, but for a few changes. The program is still the second Saturday of the month, at 10:00, and it runs about 30 minutes. The program, the planning meetings and the dress rehearsals are all done on Zoom. There is no age limit for participants, although we state that it is meant for young children. There is also no limit on how many participants. It is becoming so popular that we have children from Boston, Long Beach and Colorado. Parents still need to register their children at least two days before the actual event.

When we held our Tots program in person, we tried to keep the children engaged with activities that were "hands on." Using Zoom has been challenging to do that. So, we must keep the kids involved in different ways. During the program we have asked the children to

go look for items that we need to talk about. For example, to demonstrate the fact that snails carry their houses on their back, Melissa Rocha asked the children to look for a backpack, or a towel to wrap around their back. Brian Broders asked the children to look for coins so that he could compare the size of the hummingbird to a dime. When each parent registers for the program, they receive the Zoom instructions and a craft to do at home. On the day of the program we ask the children to bring their crafts to the Zoom session so that they can share what they made.

At the planning meetings everyone shares ideas for the theme of that month's program. There are some people who have perfected their skills and do the same each month. For example, Herb Broutt does a fantastic job of story time with the children and Sandy Holloway comes up with cute crafts. We have been having 2 dress rehearsals each month since the technology can be challenging especially since we are all new at Zooming.

We would love to have more people join us for Placerita Nature Tots. It really is fun and the docents learn a lot. It is also a way of keeping connected. Even if you do not want to be a presenter, you could come and pretend you are a Tot and give us constructive criticism. Just let me know and we will add you to the Zoom list.

I hope to see you at Zoom Nature Tots.



Hi Everyone!

As I write this note to the Docents and Volunteers of our wonderful organization, it is 107 degrees and very smoky and humid outside. So, I am trying to look at the positive side:

- I am getting good exercise going outside at least 3 times a day to water my approximately 80 Bonsai trees. It must be good for you 'cause I sweat..., a lot.
- My ponds have warm water, so the fish grow fast and I feed them about 5 times a day. Can hardly wait till filter cleaning. Fish poop Fridays around my house.
- In 6 months, two shelves in a closet have been cleared. UGH!

As you will note from the photo, we have missed one of my favorite events of the year due to the darn pandemic, The Breakfast of Champions. Usually the first Saturday in August. Ron Kraus prepares and hosts the "Are You Smarter Than a Placerita 5th Grader" contest. The winning team gets a hat created by Ron's incredibly talented wife, Jill Goddard. This FROG hat was from last year's contest. To be truthful, I was not on the winning team but when Jill saw the tears in my eyes, she kindly gave me an extra.

When I was growing up many decades ago, when I had a situation that really bothered me, my Mom would say, "This too shall pass on." I thought that was her original saying, but I have since learned otherwise. Anyway, hopefully we can all take comfort in knowing that this pandemic thing will, someday, also "pass on," and we can get back to being with people we love and doing the things we want to do.

Personally, my family and I are doing fine, and I really look forward to when my Placerita family and I can get together and enjoy picking up where we left off when this Covid-19 thing hit us. We had a lot of great things going on and terrific new Docent Class! Things that I look forward to resuming with you.

All my best to you and your families!

Fred





Hiking the Placerita Trails and Social Distancing by Lori Wolfe

During this time like no other, it can be exceedingly difficult to know what is safe to do. According to the most reliable form of information I could find, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC.gov, they recommend while visiting parks and recreation areas such as Placerita Canyon Nature Center:

- Visit parks and recreation areas that are close to your home.
- Do not visit crowded parks.
- Stay at least 6 feet away from people you do not live with.
- Wear a mask.
- Wash your hands often, and do not share items with people you do not live with.

Wearing a mask while hiking can be a challenge. Let us look at the options available. One is a disposable paper mask. This is a good option for germ safety but please remember to dispose of these in the trash, not on the trail or beside your car.

Cloth masks, either homemade or store bought, are another good choice. These can also be personalized, or color coordinated to your hiking ensemble to make a fun fashion statement.

A balaclava, or stretchy tightly knit infinity-type neck scarf that can be quickly pulled over the mouth and nose is a good choice when hiking in areas where you are not likely to meet other people very often. According to the CDC the bandana tied over the face is not the best choice for germ protection but if that is all you have; it is better than no barrier at all.

With the many new rules we all need to follow now, try not to get discouraged. Hiking in nature is one of the best ways to fight depression and loneliness, and if we must wear a mask and keep our distance it is worthwhile for keep ourselves and others safe on the trail.

Happy Hiking!

Placerita Nature Tots

Exploring Nature with Young Children
Ages 3-5 and one adult companion
for each child

Placerita Nature Tots is a free program.
You may register for one month at a time.
Registration opens the 1st of each month for
that month's program.

Please email your registration at:
nature_tots@placerita.org
with your child's and your name.

Nature Tots meets on the second Saturday of
each month at 10:00am.

This program is online using Zoom during
the Covid-19 pandemic.
September 12: Coyotes
October 10: Spiders



Jim and Barbara Wyrozumski Have Moved!

It all happened very quickly! Their house was sold in just a few days, and they moved to their new place in Mesquite, Nevada very soon after.

Jim told me his favorite thing at Placerita was doing the Saturday Animal show and handling the hawks and the snakes. Ron Kraus promised Jim that his legacy will live on because the trees he so diligently watered are now providing shade along the Placerita trail.

We will miss Barbara and Jim who participated in all our events, took care of the school groups, went on many outreaches and did a great job with the river clean up. You will both be sorely missed at Placerita. Barbara has the greatest smile!

Enjoy your new environment and your new life and come back to visit when you can.



The Carpet Looks Nice and Clean

After all the coming and going, and the school groups visiting at the beginning of the year, the carpet in the classroom looked dirty. The docents volunteered to pay for an energetic professional cleaning and soon it looked as good as new! Little did we know the building would soon be closed for many months, but the docents are pleased to be able to participate in the maintenance of the building.



Let Us Get to Know a Little Bit More About Sondra Fox Class of 2020

My husband and I moved to Valencia from Wisconsin last summer in order to live closer to our daughter. During the summer we saw a notice for the wildflower walk at Placerita. We are both nature lovers and hikers, so we decided to give it a try. We went one Saturday and joined RuthAnne's monthly wildflower walk. We enjoyed it very much and found out about the docent training at that time. That seemed to be a wonderful opportunity to learn about the natural history of this part of the county and would provide a wonderful volunteer opportunity. We attended several programming events at Placerita in the fall and in January we joined the 2020 new docent class.

It was a wonderful experience! The material presented was interesting and helped us to learn about

this area of the country, but the best part of the docent training experience was getting to know the warm and interesting people involved in the training. We made friends with many of the new docents, but also developed many great friendships with other docents at Placerita.

Then the pandemic hit! We look forward to the time when we can reconnect with our Placerita friends often, and with the nature center during programming. Our experience at Placerita helped us to feel part of this community. Placerita rocks!

My husband, Ken Yasukawa, was also a class of 2020 docent. He is a behavioral ecologist and ornithologist and was a regular at the monthly bird walks at Placerita. I have always been a plant and flower lover and have enjoyed learning about the plants in this area. I also am an avid reader, and a new, but committed, knitter. We have two children, and two granddaughters. When we moved here, we intended to be able to visit our granddaughter in Evanston, Illinois often. However, the pandemic has put a temporary hold on visiting them.

I was an elementary teacher, with a specialty in developmental education, for many years. I taught 2 -6 years old for 35+ years before I retired from fulltime teaching. Then I worked as a librarian in the children's department at our local library until we moved here. I am drawn to your Nature Tots program, but I have a commitment on the Saturday of that program. I am working with the Placerita Education Committee to provide an extension of that program for 6-8-year-olds. All the people in our nuclear family are teachers, so a love of education and -students is our shared commitment.

Placerita has been a shining star in our transition to Valencia. I look forward to a healthy world where we can fully continue the Placerita experience. I look forward to getting to know all of you better.

Sondra Fox



Setting Up the New Butterfly Garden Kiosk

Denny Truger (again) and Charitha Eragoda braved 99-degree temperature to start the installation of the kiosk in front of the butterfly garden. Of course, it seemed a little cooler after the 114 to 118 temperature from the few days before!

The task for the first day was to anchor the frame to the ground. Roof and side panels were added two days later.

Thank you so much Denny and Charitha for your dedication, and we hope you stayed hydrated! This kiosk will display great information about butterflies and their life cycle, and we hope it will make the Butterfly Garden a new point of interest for our visitors. Already the dedicated docents are gathering photos and information to add the final touch to the kiosk. It takes a village of docents and the work gets done!

Thank you all.

**AS OF JULY 1, 2020, PLACERITA CANYON PARK HOURS
ARE 7AM TO 7PM, WEDNESDAY THROUGH SUNDAY.
THE PARK IS CLOSED MONDAY & TUESDAY**

**THE NATURE CENTER BUILDING IS CLOSED UNTIL
FURTHER NOTICE. THESE HOURS ARE SUBJECT TO
CHANGE AT ANY TIME.**

**CALL THE PARK OFFICE AT 661-259-7721
FOR THE MOST UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION**

**PLACERITA CANYON
NATURE CENTER
ALL THE PROGRAMS ARE
CANCELLED BECAUSE OF
COVID-19.**

Placerita Canyon tots is taking
place with a Zoom invitation



Stephanomeria virgata

Trail Treasures By RuthAnne Murthy

Twiggy Wreath Plant or Rod Wire Chicory

As the warm summer temperatures lead into the dry autumn, there seems to be a lack of color on the golden hills of the chaparral. But at this time of year it is necessary to slow down and take a closer look. One of such plants is the annual Twiggy Wreath Plant also known as Rod-wire Chicory. The plant lives for only one season and then depends on seeds to propagate in the next year. It thrives on distressed areas such as along a hiking trail. It is often dismissed as a dead weed because it looks like a stiff erect stick by the time it is noticed. It grows up to 6 feet tall, but is often 2-3 feet tall in Placerita Canyon. Twiggy Wreath Plants are widely distributed in the Western United States.

After the seeds germinate in the spring, leaves form in a 5-7" basal rosette, leaves forming in a circle. As the stem grows, smaller leaves form that grow progressively smaller up the stem. The leaves dry and fall before the blooms appear to preserve water for the flowers. Many chaparral plants are summer deciduous for the same reason.

The flowers bloom from June to October. Even though Twiggy Wreath Plants are part of the sunflower family, they only have ray flowers, petals. There are no disk flowers, centers. The flowers range from white to lavender. The photo above is a very bright one. They are darker on the underside and often striped. The flowers are only $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter. The flowers grow right on the stem which is unusual and another way to preserve precious water. The number of petals vary from 6-18.

The seeds are less than $\frac{1}{8}$ " long. They are tapered cylinders with feathery white bristles that help distribute the seeds in the wind.

California native people made a tea from the flowers to treat intestinal worms. The tea was also used to relieve hang-overs.

So, don't become discouraged by the lack of showy blooms in the late summer. There are numerous flowers along the trail that share common attributes with Twiggy Wreath Plant. Just linger for a while and look for these charming Trail Treasures.

Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates (PCNCA)

Board of Directors Election Results

by Jim Crowley

Below you will find the results of the PCNCA Elections on June 1, 2020.

This year our Board of Directors elections took a bit of a twist. Because of Covid-19, we were forced to cancel our 2020 Docent Graduation and End of the Year potluck which is when we usually hold the Board of Directors election. We conducted the election electronically through an e-mail processor to allow submittal of votes via the US Mail. We accumulated votes from 50 members with voting spread among 7 candidates. The Election Committee sorted and tallied the 276 total votes and had a Zoom meeting to perform the final tally of the numbers. It went smoothly.

Also, a special shout out goes to our election committee consisting of Mara Cohen, Jim Crowley, Vicki Cunningham, and Jackie Thomason. They arranged the system and conducted the election. Voting participation was a bit down this year but not by much. So, we salute those voting members with a big Thank You!

2020 Board of Directors voting results:

All incumbent Board Members who ran were re-elected. They are: Ron Kraus, Rick Brammer, Fred Seeley, Herb Broutt, Jack Levenberg and Bill Webber. Chuck Lingo will serve as Alternate. Brian Broder was a write-in candidate and was nominated to serve as the other alternate on the board, but he respectfully declined.

These officers were elected: Fred Seeley is president, Gary Freiburger is Vice President, Rick Brammer is Treasurer, and Herb Broutt is Corresponding Secretary.

Congratulations to all elected on the board, we appreciate your service and dedication.

Continuing Board members voted through May 2021 are as follows:

Sue Sutton, Joan Fincutter, Cindy Gold, Erica dePoor. However, since then, Joan Fincutter resigned from her position at the August 4th Board Meeting.

I know this list can look confusing, but we are in good hands!

All those Board Members spend many hours making sure that PCNCA will survive those dark months with Covid-19 and they are here to help.

Thank you again.





Shirley Morano

I am so deeply sorry to let you know that Herb Broutt received an email from Shirley Morano's son, letting him know that she passed away last Saturday, June 13.

"I thought you would want to know that my mom, Shirley Morano, passed away this past Saturday due to complications from a pulmonary embolism. She spent a week in the hospital but was able to return to her own room with hospice care, where she passed peacefully. Placerita Canyon was an incredibly special place for my mom. I remember her taking us on outings there as a kid... long before there was Nature Center. She was very proud to have been a part of it and she really enjoyed the people she worked with. I know it was one of the high points of her life. We wanted to make sure that those who knew my mom were made aware of her passing. She was an amazing lady and I know that we all will miss her. "

Shirley was very active at Placerita in the 1970's, before the Nature Center was built. She was part of the group of women who came up with the idea of Placerita being used for educating children about nature. She was one of the first school psychologists and had a very fulfilling career. When she retired, she came back to Placerita, answering the phone so the staff could keep up with their other activities. She was a wonderful lady with an incredibly positive outlook on life, always cheerful and full of great stories. She was the telephone voice of Placerita for many years, and a mom to many docents and volunteers.

When driving on the freeway (at 97 years old!) became an issue, we were incredibly grateful that Herb Broutt could bring her to the Nature Center for our different events. She was always a joy to talk to. She would come each year during docent training to explain to the new trainees how the Nature Center was started. The last time she came to the Center she went to a restaurant with a group of docents to celebrate her 99th birthday! She shared her birthday dessert and you can see how many spoons are on her plate! Such a sweet woman! Shirley was a jewel and a fantastic friend to Placerita. She will be greatly missed. May she rest in peace.



Together with the Rattler

I asked the docents to send some photos with the Rattler to show us what they were doing while "Safer at Home".

John Whitaker was the first one to send me a photo, he is relaxing reading the Rattler. That was a great start!

Glenda Perl was having a good time remembering this trip. " This photo is from summer 2015, with Alcatraz Island in the background, the Rattler came along!"

RuthAnne Murthy sent me this photo. I was not offended that she fell asleep reading the Rattler, but I was extremely grateful that she sent me a photo!

Charlotte, Cyrus Clark and Mischa, the Golden Retriever, could not figure out why Grandma Evelynne made them pose with the Rattler, but they gracefully accepted the ordeal



Robert Grzesiak, Placerita's Docent of the Year

We are delighted to announce that Robert Grzesiak was voted Docent of the year for Placerita Canyon Nature Center. Congratulations, Robert.

For many years you have followed his efforts in the Rattler through his articles: "Invasive Plant removal/Restoration Committee". He built a team to help him with removal of Tamarisk in the Placerita Creek bed, along with tobacco trees and Smilo grass. Many docents took part in those days of weed removal. You have seen him establishing the butterfly garden, planting and clearing up along the Braille trail, planting the hummingbird garden and the nursery. Robert can be seen in all kinds of weather with garden gloves working in the earth, planting and pulling weeds, and we want to recognize his efforts to improve Placerita for so many years.

Robert became a docent in 2012 but who is Robert? Here are some parts of his previous interview.

I was born in Chicago, Illinois and was very much a city boy. I spent my childhood rooting for the Chicago White Sox and the Cubs, playing basketball and delivering newspapers. The move to California was not something I looked forward to. Despite what you might think, there are vegetable gardens everywhere in Chicago. So, I like growing vegetables and native plants in my garden.

My love of nature developed very gradually. It was not until I was in my 30's that I began to hike. Naturally, I began to be curious about my companions: the geology, plants and animals that I would encounter. My wife was a flashy PR gal when I first met her and now is a counselor for community colleges. My son is a charter airplane pilot. I have a B.A. in Clinical Sciences and started my own business cleaning swimming pools. It was a great way to learn about insects. I was always finding unknown creatures in the pools, and I would research them. I then parlayed my practical pool chemistry experience into hospital chemistry for the Veteran's Administration. mostly employed in detecting drugs (toxicology) but later into detecting disease through the antibody response (Serology). HIV syndrome had just been identified when I first started, and it became a connective thread throughout my career.

Being a docent at Placerita Canyon Nature Center has been a great nature learning experience, and made it possible to meet great people with such talents. Really, it is a chance to share and encourage the enjoyment of this great park."

Dear Robert, thank you so much for all those many years making Placerita a better place. We can see the result of all your efforts. So many bags of weeds were collected since 2012! We hope that you will understand that voting you Docent of the Year is the way PCNCA can show you the deep appreciation that we have for your incredible dedication.



Vicki Cunningham Has Moved!

Vicki and Glenn are moving to Washington to be closer to their family and we wish them all the absolute best.

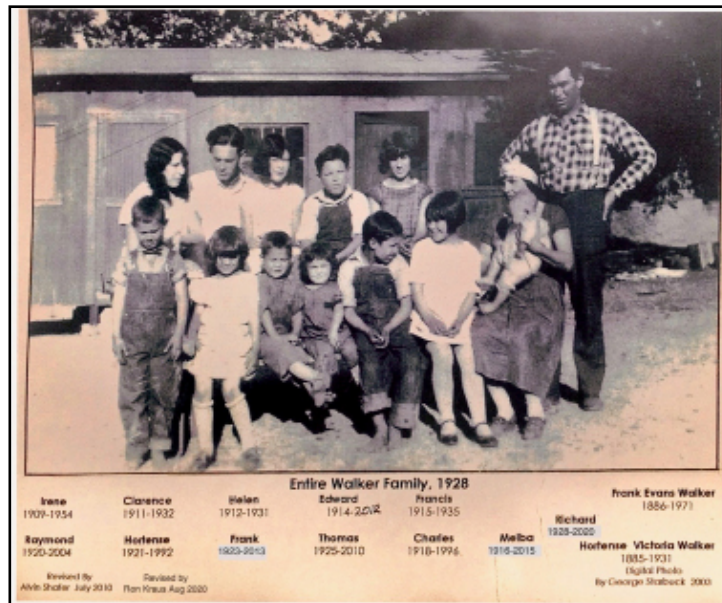
Vicki will be terribly missed at Placerita. She revamped a few docent trainings classes, introducing many scientific elements. She was part of the PCNCA board in 2015. She helped with many school groups and was fantastic doing the animal presentation, having a natural enthusiasm that was easy to share. She was always willing to help with the special events and took part on many occasions in the "Gardeners of the Wild" with removal of non-native invasive plants. I remember when she came with PCNCA to the Hollywood Bowl and the Natural History Museum. She took part in many hikes with the docents to discover trails together. I have a vivid memory of Vicki working for days, in the heat of the summer, cleaning, touching up and protecting the mural under the bridge. She worked with a tiny sponge and did detailed research on the type of paint used and the perfect colors!

We will always miss her big smile, her bright and sharp mind and her unflinching optimism. It was a great joy knowing you, Vicki, we wish you good luck in Washington and we hope you will be able to share many happy moments with your family.

Message from Vicki "Placerita Canyon has been a glorious part of my Santa Clarita experience. I hiked the Waterfall trail on one of my first visits to the valley and wondered enthusiastically at the blooming ceanothus. My kids saw their first "wild" rattlesnake here and spent happy days watching tadpoles wriggle in the stream and scrub jays hide their acorn prizes. This beautiful area provided quick access to a nature fix throughout many years and I felt honored to support the park building trails and benches alongside prospective Eagle Scouts, picking up trash, and stomping out latent embers from the paths after fire. Then, I officially joined the Placerita family as a docent in the class of 2011. It was thrilling to dig deeper into an understanding of this special place! I loved watching nature connections grow in our visiting school children, pulling invasive plants, and working to refurbish our treasured mural. I enjoyed working on the board and the election committee, cleaning the pond, going on field trips, and sharing treats. I loved meeting the new crop of docents each year and watching you bring your talents and enthusiasm into the sphere. Perhaps it would be easier to leave the area if you all were not so wonderful!

I am already looking for nature volunteer opportunities near my new home in Maple Valley (about 30 miles southeast of Seattle). We chose this place because of its ready access to trails and mountains and I intend to take full advantage of these resources. I expect to be able to provide information and even accommodations to visitors and hope I will hear from some of you as you look to experience another corner of natural beauty. Thank you for allowing my roots to thrive at Placerita!"





Richard Walker, RIP

We are deeply sorry to let you know that the last of the Walker children, Richard, passed away on August 1st. We are incredibly grateful to Bob Walker for sending us the eulogy.

Richard J. Walker

Born March 30, 1928 to Frank E. Walker and Hortense V. Reynier Walker. He was the last born and last surviving of twelve brothers and sisters. He grew up on the family ranch in Placerita Canyon. He worked with his brothers mining gold and during World War II. He and his father raised about 10,000 chickens for the war effort. Many early western movies were filmed on the Walker Ranch property and Richard hauled water in their old 1935 Ford truck for dust control.

On his 18th birthday in 1964 he joined the U.S. Air Force. After his training he was based in San Francisco where he did fleet service--cleaning the C-54 transport planes. In 1949 he was transferred to the Marshall Islands, Kwajalien for one year. The United States was testing atomic bombs there. During a rain storm, Richard was showered with radiation. He believed that the radiation exposure caused him several cancers and made him unable to have children with his wife, Sadie. Richard wanted to remain in the Air force, but his wife talked him into retiring.

They moved to Durham, California and Richard worked at an almond grove owned by Sadie's sister Alice, and brother-in-law Ray. From 1960 until 1987 Richard joined the teamster union and hauled produce. After his wife Sadie passed away in the 1990's. Richard was managing a mobile home park on Butte Creek, near Chico. It was there that he met his second wife, Vonnice. When he retired from his mobile home park managing job, they moved to Chico. Richard and Vonnice have many friends in Chico. They enjoyed going out and traveling with them. Richard enjoyed returning to Placerita Canyon where he grew up reminiscing how things were there years ago. He also enjoyed visiting family that still live in the area.

Because of Vonnice's failing health, they moved to Maine about 8 months ago where her son Perry and daughter-in-law Jane cared for them. Unfortunately, Vonnice passed away shortly after they moved to Maine. They spent over twenty happy years together. Richard continued living with Perry and Jane under their care, until he passed away August 1, 2020.

Richard was well liked and will be missed by surviving sons, daughters, nieces, nephews, grandchildren and all of his close friends.