

Mt. Helix Park's Magazine

FROM THE TOP

ISSUE 11 SPRING / SUMMER 2018



MT. HELIX PARK
FOUNDATION

*Dedicated to Preserving
Mt. Helix Nature Theatre and Park*

**A-Foot & Fit
AT THE PARK**

**Eagle Scout
PROJECT**

**Volunteer
Spotlight**

**11th annual
heART of
Mt. Helix
ALMOST HERE**

**NATIVE
PLANTS**

PARK HOURS

SEPT 1 - OCT 31: 5:30 AM TO 5:30 PM | NOV 1 - FEB 28: 5:30 AM TO 7:00 PM
MARCH 1 - MAY 31: 5:30 AM TO 8:00 PM | JUNE 1 - AUG 31: 5:30 AM TO 8:30 PM

NATURE | EVENTS | LOCAL HISTORY | PEOPLE | PRESERVATION

From the Executive Director

Nicole Roberts
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Mt. Helix Park Foundation



89 years ago, the Mt. Helix Park property was put into a private trust naming the County of San Diego as trustee by the original land owners, Mary Yawkey White and Cyrus Carpenter Yawkey. The trust indenture, dated June 14, 1929, outlined how the property was to be used, maintained, and improved. After almost a decade of action in the courts including two lawsuits against the County maintaining a public park with a religious monument, the Mt. Helix Park Foundation was formed and became the successor trustee to ensure the historical Memorial Cross, Amphitheater and Park grounds would remain a treasured landmark in the community.

The Mt. Helix Park Foundation is a unique public charity because it is also a trustee. The Foundation is bound by the terms, trusts, and conditions set forth in the trust document as it pertains to the original park land. A few of the most notable terms of the trust include: that for as long as the tradition exists, an Easter sunrise service must be held in the amphitheater and open to people of

all creeds, religions, and nations. This year will mark the 93rd sunrise service to fulfill that mandate. The trust also states that the property must never be used for political purposes, must be kept in good condition, and always accessible to the public. The Memorial Cross, which must be lit at a minimum of six times per year, must also serve as the only memorial on the property to commemorate any person or event.

The intention that inspires me the most is the very first one that appears in the trust:

DOES HEREBY DEDICATE said property, and the whole thereof, to the use, enjoyment and inspiration of All People, and desires the same to inure forever to the use of the Public in general and of the Citizens and Residents of the County of San Diego and the State of California in particular, to be by them used, free from any and all charges - for such benevolent, religious, educational and charitable purposes as will contribute to promote knowledge and culture, to relieve the distressed in body, mind and/or spirit, to cultivate a love for the beautiful in art and nature, to foster an interest in and love of music and the drama, and to promote all things which tend to elevate and refine mankind ...

As Executive Director, I am truly impressed by the work and dedication of the Foundation board members, who embrace their responsibility as successor trustee to preserve the charitable intentions of the Yawkey family. ■

MT. HELIX PARK

From the Top is a semi-annual publication of Mt. Helix Park.

To contact the Editor call 619-741-4363 or email nroberts@mthelixpark.org. © Copyright 2017 Mt. Helix Park

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Bring in your used ink cartridges and we will recycle them with profits going directly to Mt. Helix Park. Drop them in our mail box (located behind the stage) anytime or stop by the under-stage office Monday, Wednesday or Friday from 9 am until noon.



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A-Foot and Fit at Mt. Helix Park

by Peggy Junker

For anyone not excited by the prospect of working out in a gym, San Diego might be the perfect place to live. San Diegans pay an estimated 44 percent more to live in this fair city than the rest of the United States, so why not glean the rewards of living here and get outdoors while two thirds of the country are stuck inside on a treadmill.

Mt. Helix residents have an edge on this already perfect climate by virtue of the fact that they reside in one of the quaintest corners of East County. To sweeten the deal further, this community is topped by one of the most iconic, aesthetic, and public spaces in San Diego County, Mt. Helix Park.

A private, non-profit Park, the nearly century old 12-acre park is home to the notable nature theatre, built in 1925 as a tribute to Mary Carpenter Yawkey by her children, Cyrus Carpenter Yawkey and Mary Yawkey White.

Open year-round and free to the public, it is the perfect destination point for an on-foot, out-of-doors workout. Beginning at the Park's lower lots, located at the corner of Mt. Helix Drive and Vivera Drive, visitors are welcome to park their cars free of charge while visiting the Park which keeps seasonal hours listed on the website, www.mthelixpark.org, and which basically run from a half hour before sunset to a half hour after sunset.

For fitness device enthusiasts, the step count from the lower Vivera Dr. lot to the Park's memorial cross is approximately 1,500 and, with an incline equaling roughly 28 floors, it's a great way to warm up. Once at the top, the amphitheater itself is a virtual smorgasbord of options with 80 small steps leading to the stage, or, for those wanting a bigger challenge, the stone seats offer 41 larger steps to give you a really nice workout for the back of the legs and calves.

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Eagle Scout Legend Rotsart Earns Rank Through His Park Service Project

by Jeff Swiney

San Diego County is classified as a Mediterranean to semiarid climate, and so it has become necessary to supplement the lack of rain with sprinkler systems. Areas where the Foundation has installed sprinkler systems include: the Office Garden, the Peninsula Garden, the Raised Flower Bed at the Main Entrance Gates, the Main Kiosk area, and the fenced-in area surrounding the Cross.

Another area where the Park has planted native plants is immediately above the Yawkey Trail on the western to southern slopes. Even though volunteers have been hand watering the new plants, they have not done well through the summer. While a sprinkling system was dearly needed, there were funding limitations. Then to the rescue came Life Scout Legend Rotsart from local Boy Scout Troop 319. Legend was seeking to earn his Eagle Scout rank by completing a service project at Mt. Helix Park. Following discussions with Legend and his father, Steven Rotsart, Jr., it was determined that a sprinkler system above the Yawkey trail would be an appropriate project for the park. Legend presented his project idea to the full Mt. Helix Park Foundation board which received unanimous approval. He organized the entire project by fundraising for needed supplies, recruiting volunteers, and supervising the work party throughout the installation process which was completed in one full day. If a Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent, he is said to be following all the principles of Scout Law. Legend demonstrated every single one of these traits throughout the entire project.

On February 22, 2018, Legend was officially awarded Eagle Scout Rank and, thanks to his hard work, the Park has expanded its sprinkling line by 150 feet to help maintain the beautiful California native plants above the Yawkey trail. ■

11TH ANNUAL HEART OF MT. HELIX Something New for 2018!

The most important and awaited fundraiser for the Mt Helix Park Foundation, the heART of Mt. Helix, is now in its 11th year. Each year, event organizers incorporate a unique element alongside traditional favorites such as restaurant tastings, hand selected wine, live art demonstrations and music, incredible views, and dancing under the stars. This year's soiree will feature Casino Concepts, an East County company now in its 26th year of business. The private gaming company has been contracted to provide 10 tables which will be located in the two main gathering points of the venue. Managing partner, Allan Haller, is working closely with coordinators to ensure that this new element is fun for all while helping raise needed funds. Each admission ticket to the heART will include one gold coin to start play. The coin is then exchanged for \$250 worth of chips to be used at either a craps or blackjack table, and additional coins can be purchased for \$25 each throughout the evening. Professional dealers are friendly, courteous, helpful, and happy to help guests understand the concepts and strategies of the game. Casino play will run 6 to 11 p.m. breaking only for the live auction. At the end of play, players will exchange their chips for raffle tickets, one per every \$100 or part thereof. There will be great raffle prizes exclusive to the casino players. Those not interested in casino play may exchange the gold coin included with admission for 3 raffle tickets at the event. Casino play will bring a refreshing new element of fun to the event in 2018. Tickets go on sale June 1, 2018 at mthelixpark.org.



Welcome New Board Member Krista Bishop Powers

The Mt. Helix Park Foundation welcomes new board director, Krista Bishop Powers. Krista grew up in the Mt. Helix community and helped her parents as a young girl gather signatures and participate in candlelight walks to "Save the Cross."

Krista's professional experience in the fields of marketing, branding, and digital media align with the Foundation's current goal to increase Park membership. Krista's passion for community service is demonstrated through serving on additional boards including the San Diego Bowl Foundation, San Diego Las Hermanas, and the Grossmont Mt. Helix Improvement Association. She is also employed as an adjunct undergraduate and graduate professor and keeps busy raising her two boys. Welcome Aboard Krista! ■



Park Yoga

Weekly, M-W-F, 9 to 10:15 a.m.

This drop-in class is designed for all levels of experience. Every day and every class is new, different and special. All you need to bring is a mat (or towel), water and an open mind. Suggested donation \$10-15 or students are asked to join the Friend of the Park annual membership program.

MT. HELIX PARK

Free Community Events Calendar

Spring Nature Lecture

Check Website for Update
Host: MHPF & Habitat Restoration Group



2nd annual Harvest Family Festival

Sunday, October 28
Host: MHPF & GMIA



11th annual heART of Mt. Helix

Saturday, August 11
Host: MHPF



Fall Nature Lecture

Check Website for Update
Host: MHPF & Habitat Restoration Group



Star Gazing Astronomy Night

Saturday, September 16
Host: MHPF



28th annual Caroling Atop Mt Helix

Saturday, December 15
Host: MHPF



Children's Art Camp

Mon, Oct 15 – Fri, Oct 19 (Fall Break)
Host: Art Smarts, Inc.



Find more information at mthelixpark.org
or call the Park office at 619-741-4363.

the heART of mt helix
2018
Save the Date!

Saturday, August 11, 2018 5 – 11 pm
 11th annual heART of Mt. Helix

Food Wine Music Art
 Fabulous Auction Items
 Casino Play Raffle Boxes
 Dancing under the stars
 to The Mighty Untouchables!

Tickets on Sale June 1, 2018
MtHelixPark.org



Create Your Dream Wedding at Mt. Helix Park

If you are planning an intimate wedding or a large wedding and reception, Mt. Helix Park will take your breath away!

- Spectacular 360 degree views
- Outside Catering and rentals allowed
- Easy parking and shuttling to Park entrance
- 100% rental fees support the Park

Mt. Helix Park may also be booked for memorial services, celebration of life events, church and non-profit functions.

Call 619-741-4363 for pricing or visit at mthelixpark.org.

Become a *Friend of the Park* Member Today

The Mt. Helix Park Foundation receives no government funding and relies on the support of our visitors to keep this community's most treasured historical landmark preserved, improved, and open free to the public every day of the year.

Annual Memberships start at \$35 (per family). All members receive...

- Subscription to bi-annual *From the Top* magazine
- Email notifications of upcoming programs and events
- Invitations to special member only events
- Discounts on Park event admissions
- Mailed renewal letter reminder

Please visit mthelixpark.org for information on additional annual fund giving levels or to donate online. Your support is crucial and appreciated.



\$15 off 2018 heART tickets!

Park members receive \$15 off one general admission ticket (up to 2 tickets per membership) to the 11th annual heART of Mt Helix. Memberships can be purchased on the heART ticketing site starting June 1, 2018.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Sharon Smith

by Peggy Junker

Unassuming and hardworking, Sharon Smith began her volunteer stint on the heART of Mt. Helix committee in 2013 after having read about the Park in *From the Top*, its bi-annual magazine. First working as a general team member to put on the annual gala/fundraiser, she then quickly stepped into the role of event set-up coordinator where she has remained.

What most see is a soft-spoken, tenacious volunteer with a committed work ethic. What many don't know is that Smith is a key manager for the Navy, a licensed Architect with a Master's of Historic Preservation from the University of Southern California, and an invaluable resource for the Park.

It wasn't long after Smith's initial involvement with the Park that her technical skills became a fit for her next project, when in 2014 she joined a focus-group dedicated to developing a Master Site Plan for the Park. Smith, along with former Executive Director and current Mt. Helix Park Foundation board member, Tracey Stotz, current Executive Director, Nicole Roberts, and VP of Facilities, Jeff Swiney, joined together and breathed new life into a key sub-committee, with the intent "to put everything in writing so the board can review it, including restrictions, functional areas, design guidelines," summarized Smith.

Smith likes that her work with the committee paired them with local resources such as La Mesa Historical Society's Jim Newland as well as personnel from Grossmont High School Museum and gave her occasion to review a host of pioneer documents. She also likes the vision Park leaders have for the process, which is to put together a document that sets a framework for future maintenance and improvements to the Park.

"We are treating it as one comprehensive document," said Smith of a plan that incorporates the Park's guiding documents. "Having everything pulled together in one place so people can reference helps with decision making...It's always good to have a roadmap," she added.

Summing up the essence of Smith's working style, Stotz praised her colleague: "I think what I most enjoy about working with Sharon is that she quietly gets amazing things done. It's never about her. She's in this because she wants to help," she noted, adding that no matter what the volunteer position, "she always puts the interest of the Park and our local community first."

A native of Wisconsin, Smith has lived on Mt. Helix since 1994 with her husband, who is retired from both the Civil Engineer Corps and as Director of Construction for the San Diego City School District. They are co-owners of Reed's Hobbies on La Mesa Boulevard. She says she was drawn to the uniqueness of the Mt. Helix neighborhood.



"I loved the community," professed Smith. "Just the diversity and the housing; the little winding streets. It's not cookie-cutter. And the history of it as an artist's community."

Now Smith wants to give something back to the community that she has lived in for over two decades. She joins a group of esteemed professionals, who bring their expertise, pro bono, to preserve and maintain the Park for future generations.

"There's such a dedicated group of people working with the Park," noted Smith. "It's a labor of love for such a beautiful place. It's for the good of Mt. Helix and other people that use it. I hope to make a difference for future people who want to use the Park," she concluded. ■

Continued from page 3

The steps or historic low-lying rock walls that surround the Park are ideal for incline pushups or quadricep lifts. You may want to bring a towel--the stones can be a little rough on your palms.

For the ultimate cooldown experience, the quarter-mile Yawkey Trail circles from the northern to the southern ends of the Park and offers a serene walk through the Park's habitat restoration area, flanked by California native plants against a back drop of views as far east as El Capitan mountain.

End off with a drink from one of two water fountains located on either side of the stage, and take a seat in the theater for a final meditation or contemplate the breathtaking views that reach all the way to Mexico.

For anyone who prefers a more structured workout, Helix Yoga offers donation-based, all-level yoga class at the Park on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 9 to 10:15 a.m. For more information regarding Helix Yoga, visit their Facebook page. ■

Habitat Update: What Works, What Doesn't

By: Peggy Junker

Trial and error has helped the Mt. Helix Park Habitat Restoration Group vet some of the hardiest plants for creating a California native landscape in some of the toughest drought conditions on record.

Since forming in 2013, this volunteer group has planted more than 300 plants in the 12-acre community Park, many of which are hand watered and monitored individually until they are established. Careful observation of these plants has allowed staff and volunteers to boil down a list of the most successful plants for the hilltop.

For those who live in the Mt. Helix area and are looking to incorporate some of these beloved local plants into your garden, here's what is working at the Park:

Among the hardiest of the newly planted species is the San Diego Sunflower (Bush Bahiopsis laciniata Viguiera). Because of their success, volunteers have planted more than 60 of these survivors. If you are looking for something that does well in our arid climate, stays looking nice in the garden and provides beautiful flowers throughout the year, not to mention insect and bird food, this is your plant. This evergreen bush likes sun and part-sun. Park plant expert and Mt. Helix Park Foundation board member Ed Piffard suggests using these plants in conjunction with slower growing plants, to fill in while other, slower growing varieties get established.

Another hardy plant is salvia or "sage." With little effort sage can look presentable all year-round. In the summer, when the oils in the plant heat up, sage emits an aroma that is unmistakably California wilderness. Newly planted varieties are the Cleveland Sage (*Salvia clevelandii*), Grey Musk Sage (*Salvia Pozo blue*), Munz's Sage (*Salvia munzii*) and White Sage (*Salvia apiana*). The Grey Musk Sage can be seen in front of the Park office while other varieties can be seen along the west end of the Park's quarter-mile Yawkey Trail where the sun and a little hand-watering have made ideal growing conditions. Some of the sages planted there are now 4 to 5 feet in diameter and vibrant. Sage, such as the white sage, are a nice accent for



BUCKWHEAT



DESERT MALLOW



LEMONDADE BERRY



SUGAR BUSH

adding a touch of blue/grey to a garden.

Wowing Park visitors are the coral, yellow and orange blooms of the Desert Mallow (*Sphaeralcea ambigua*) and Desert Indian Mallow (*Abutilon palmeri*). The first occurs in front of the Park office and in the landscaped area adjacent to the Park's main lot, and the second can be found at the west end of the trail. These lovelies would be right at home in anything from a xeriscape yard to an English garden.

Two show stoppers are the Stinging Lupine (*Lupinus hirsutissimus*) and the California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*). Although these are annual flowers, they can already be seen coming up all over the Park, and in a few weeks will begin to dot the landscape with bright purple and orange blooms. Although these will brown and eventually die, they readily reseed themselves, ensuring next year's display.

What has existed in the Park for decades and are still thriving today are some of the larger shrubs such as Lemonade Berry Bush, Sugar Bush, Toyon and Sumac. If you are looking for a large, hardy evergreen, these make great visual barriers and eventually will need little to no supplemental water (bear in mind some people are highly allergic to Sumac so plant this one with caution).

Aside from some weeding and trash pickup, the Park's habitat team tries to keep the hillsides maintenance-free. Healthy hillsides are thick with plants like Artemisia and Buckwheat, which propagate themselves with little rainfall.

"Anything that is a pioneer plant," summarizes Piffard, "like sage, artemisia, buckwheat, mallow, *Salvia munzii* —they all do really well. They put down roots pretty quickly and do survive the summers," he adds.

"The plants we've had trouble with are plants that put down roots slowly like Spiny Redberry; some Ceanothus, they can struggle too," Piffard points out. "The issue is to get plants that get roots established so they can get there on their own. Because we have no irrigation, we have



MT. HELIX PARK FOUNDATION

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Please visit www.mthelixpark.org and from the home page select "Contact Us" to send your email to be included in the electronic magazine distribution. Park members will continue to receive a mailed hardcopy of the magazine.

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Make a Gift: Become a Friend of the Park.

Become a Park Member

Please consider becoming a "Friend of the Park" member by making a tax deductible donation in the enclosed envelope. Your donation helps ensure Mt. Helix Park remains an oasis of beauty in our community by supporting on-going operations and free public programs.



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2017 Winners



1st: COMING DOWN, Mike Hefner



2nd: SHADOWS, Roz Oserin



3rd: STONE STEPS, Drew Bandish

Be Part of the 2nd annual heART of Mt. Helix Juried Art Show

Cash Prizes to Place Winners

All winners receive one admission ticket to the heART event, a place ribbon, entry into the Juried Gallery Show, and entry to the winners' display booth at the heART event.

- Juror: Elaine Harvey
- Theme: All things Mt. Helix including parks, people, and events
- Juried Gallery show sponsored by

Nainsook
framing + art

- Entry fees and a portion of the art sales benefit the Mt. Helix Park Foundation
- Entries due July 6, 2018

For more information and entry form visit mthelixpark.org.

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real trouble getting them established."

One of Piffard's favorites is the Ceanothus (Mountain Lilac). Although difficult to establish in the Park, new varieties and locations are being tested and staff are hoping to increase the success rate since these are some of the most beautiful, impressive native flowering bushes in the area. A great example of a healthy grove can be found on Cowles Mountain or at Oak Oasis near the El Capitan Mountain where the bush covers entire areas and provides a stunning show of purple blooms in the spring and summer.

If you are a traditional gardener (roses, box hedges, lawn) and are troubled by the soil you have on your property, here's the good news—California native plants like soil rich in clay. In fact, when plants are put in the ground at the Park, no soil amendments are added. While soils vary, even locally, typically these plants require no, or less-than-average amending.

For anyone wanting more information regarding the Park's Habitat Restoration Group, to volunteer or to adopt a plot within the Park, contact pjunker@mthelixpark.org or call (619) 741-4363.