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FRIENDS *of* VILLA GRANDE NEWSLETTER

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OUR MISSION

- ❖ RESTORE AND MAINTAIN PATTERSON POINT AS A RIPARIAN PRESERVE FOR LIMITED PUBLIC RECREATION USE
- ❖ PRESERVE THE HISTORIC AND UNIQUE CHARACTER OF VILLA GRANDE
- ❖ ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE GREATER VILLA GRANDE COMMUNITY

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Like every other organization in the world, Friends of Villa Grande will remember 2020 as its most challenging year to date. Due to Covid-19, FoVG replaced its Spring "Disco Daze" fundraiser with a virtual version, cancelled the July 4th celebration as well as our member appreciation beach party, and, for the second time, postponed the "Off-the-Beaten Path" tour of the Preserve.

A surge of visitors escaping quarantine elsewhere overwhelmed our tiny town and Patterson Point Preserve, especially during the three holiday weekends. Community members and the FoVG board rallied to put procedures in place to educate the public on wearing masks, improve safety on the River and minimize parking problems.

Between schools starting again and smoke from the fires, the crowds have been re-

duced. The pandemic still rages. Our e-newsletters provide up-to-date information on Covid-19, the fires, and other items of local interest.

We don't know what the future has in store, but FoVG continues to provide help and resources for the greater Villa Grande community to address challenges as they arise. We have as a group joined together to create ventures that are unparalleled elsewhere and be of service to our friends, family, and neighbors. Thank you for being part of our community. You make a difference.

With gratitude and respect,
Kyla Brooke
President, FoVG

PANDEMIC PRESSURE ON PATTERSON POINT PRESERVE

Not only has Covid-19 impacted our personal and professional lives, it also changed the usage of Patterson Point Preserve. It became obvious in early spring when the State closed the oceanside parking lots that the impact on the river beaches was going to be severe. In preparation, the FoVG Board closed parking at the end of 3rd street and adopted the State's Covid-19 policy guidelines.

To help educate the public about the constantly changing guidelines, FoVG set up an information table at the Preserve entry and enforced a "No mask, No entry" rule. FoVG also upgraded the portable toilet to a model with a handwashing station.

We are fortunate that many Board and community volunteers stepped up to assist in this process. Thanks to volunteers Katie Gib-

son, Kyra Wink, Jon Box, Roberto Esteves, Kyla Brooke, Nancy Lopes, Bonnie Peterson, Kelsey and Mike Sheofsky, Tom Cocuzzi, Chris Resler, Natalie and Sukey Robb-Wilder, Minh Ta, Ruben Garcia, Luke Hamilton, Bonnie and Curt Peterson, Dancy Girot,

Rich Holmer, Bryan Hughes and Tim Cahn who helped at the Covid-19 information table.

Special gratitude to John Schneider, who volunteered weekend and weekday hours, cheerfully welcoming visitors and handling the occasional grumble. Thank you John, for all your support!

In the end, many visitors thanked us for helping to keep them safe, and we signed up new members and received significant cash donations as well.



PATTERSON POINT PRESERVE RESTORATION UPDATE

The end of summer means the start of restoration season in the Preserve. First, a special thanks to Natalie Robb-Wilder for refurbishing all of her beautiful hand-painted signs in the preserve. Next, volunteers installed fencing to discourage beachgoers from traipsing through the restored area above the boat anchorage to relieve themselves. New signage directs them to the portable toilet at the trailhead.

A major project to control erosion above the sandy beach took place in September. Led by our consultant, Harold Appleton, and restoration manager, Leah Norwood, ivy was removed and replaced with erosion control netting. Sprigs of dogwood and willow were planted and will add to the bank's stability.

Two steps were built on the steep

path to the beach, made from woven willow covered with a coconut fiber mat. Soil and seeds were added and then topped with compacted soils and stepping stones, all to reduce erosion from people and the river. Thanks to restoration committee members

Natalie Robb-Wilder, Rich Holmer, Linda Fisher, Lance Russell and Sukey Robb-Wilder.

Other restoration projects planned for this season include new plantings in the old parking lot area and replacing ivy in the swales with native grass.

Covid-19 protocols have been detailed and are being followed by all restoration volunteers. If you could spend a few hours assisting in this important effort, please email friends@villa-grande.org to let us know your availability.



Harold Appleton, Sukey Robb-Wilder, Natalie Robb-Wilder and Linda Fisher install erosion control fabric above the sandy beach.

AROUND TOWN AND PATTERSON POINT

Although official 4th of July activities were canceled this year, a surge of visitors overran Villa Grande during the holiday weekend. We counted more than 400 people entering the Preserve on the Fourth, and that was after the County blocked off Russian River Avenue and 3rd Street parking. Closures at other river and ocean access spots sent record numbers of visitors our way.

At the July 12 FoVG membership meeting, discussion centered on what measures could be taken to control beach access and alleviate parking problems. Out of that meeting came proposals that were presented and voted on at the Town Hall on August 8.

1. Limit visitors to Preserve. 93% Approval.

The rules under which FoVG operates Patterson Point Preserve don't allow closing it - there must always be public access. However, due to the Covid-19 emergency, in July we asked for and received permission from Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Open Space) to implement a quota system. For the following busy weekends, volunteers monitored the 3rd Street entrance and during peak times and stopped some visitors from entering.

On a long-term basis, FoVG needs to determine what the "carrying capacity" of the Preserve is for recreational use within the guidelines of our conservation covenant. A committee is forming to define this capacity based upon beach size and conservation needs, with guidance from the experience of other parks. If you would like to help out, please contact Kyla Brooke.

2. Unify no-parking signage. 46% Approval.

Most no-parking signs around town are not enforceable. Some lo-

cations that are enforceable, such as driveways, have no signs. A consistent approach could encourage better parking behavior by visitors. Johannes Verovertsz of Sonoma County Transportation and Public Works offered to work with us on appropriate and enforceable signage. A committee chaired by Katie Gibson will be making recommendations to Johannes before next spring.

3. Only walk-in or bike-in access to Preserve. 27% Approval.

Open Space pointed out that there is no parking in the preserve, so this plan is actually in effect already.

4. Implement parking permits. 23% Approval.

While popular in cities, Sonoma County currently has no permit parking programs for rural areas. The complexities of parking permits include eligibility, signage, hours of operation, time limits, enforcement and resident participation. In response to complaints from several west county communities, Supervisor Lynda Hopkins has established a Residential Permit Parking Ad Hoc Committee (RPP). The committee will be looking at how other towns handle parking and then survey residents to gauge enthusiasm for various proposals. The committee chair is Kyra Wink; please contact her to participate in the process.

5. Online registration for visitors. 16% Approval.

This plan would allow locals unlimited access, but restrict out-of-towners. Open space rejected the idea for being discriminatory.

As the committees work out their proposal details, look for updates in FoVG e-newsletters over the winter. To participate in the process, contact the committee leads via their email addresses on the facing page.

FOVG FUNDRAISER FOR FOOD BANK

Rather than cancel our annual spring fundraiser this past May, the "Disco Daze" dinner and dance was repurposed by the FoVG Board as a benefit for people affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The two hour event was a dress-up-and-dance-from-

home Zoom party hosted by Drew Beck, DJ'ing from Brooklyn, with all donations benefiting the Redwood Empire Food Bank. We set a goal of \$2000 and ended up raising over \$2800. Thanks, boogie people!

TRAINS TO THE RIVER - THE FIRST 25 YEARS

With the rapid growth of San Francisco in the "49ers" era, the lumber industry in western Sonoma county responded, first with shipments by boat down the Russian River to the coast, and later by two train lines. One line, with standard 4'8-1/2" spacing, went from Petaluma north to Fulton, then along River Road to Guerneville, where it stopped. The second, more interesting one that includes Villa Grande, was a narrow gauge (3' spacing), and ran from Cazadero to Saucelito (yes, that was the spelling until 1887).

That line, the North Pacific Coast Rail Road (N.P.C.), incorporated in 1871, was founded by men with substantial holdings in the lower Russian River forest who were looking for an easier way to transport their lumber. The area ultimately supported six lumber mills, from the coast to the Bohemian Grove and south along Dutch Bill Creek to Occidental, then known as Summit. They chose narrow gauge for its ability to handle curves as well as its lower construction and operating cost.

Controversy surrounded the route chosen for the N.P.C., as the initial plan did not include San Rafael, the Marin county seat. However Tomales, at the time the second largest city in Marin county, was included in the route to help secure funding from the county. Critics argued that going through the Sonoma valley would make more economic sense, for supplying farm

products to San Francisco, but the N.P.C. directors were focused on their redwood holdings at the Russian River.

The railroad was built primarily with Chinese laborers, using blasting powder and hand tools to dig tunnels and erect bridges. At Brown's Canyon near Occidental, the timber bridge held the record as the highest west of the Mississippi River, at 137 feet above the streambed.



Image courtesy of Sonoma County Library.

The line opened with service from Saucelito in January 1875, crossing Marin county to Tomales Bay at Point Reyes Station, then north to the terminus at Tomales, making 16 stops in all. In July 1877, service was extended through Valley Ford, Freestone, Occidental, Camp Meeker and Russian River Station (renamed Monte Rio), ending at Duncans Mills. Travelers could stay at Alexander Duncan's luxury hotel, the Julian, or catch a stage coach to Mendocino.

The experience of riding the trains and the fate of the N.P.C. will be in the next Newsletter.

IT'S BEEN A BUMPY RIDE

For years residents have complained about the poor condition of roads in Villa Grande as well as the flooding and ponding during the rainy season. As reported in our March newsletter, Johannes Verhovertz, Director of Department of Transportation and Public Works for Sonoma County came for a walk-through of Villa Grande. He suggested that if we could fund a road survey, the County would implement the recommendations.

We subsequently contacted Coastland Civil Engineering, who visited and submitted a proposal in February. The map shows ponding problem areas in red, the existing storm drain as a blue line and the proposed drains in yellow. Blue boxes are inlets to the new drains.

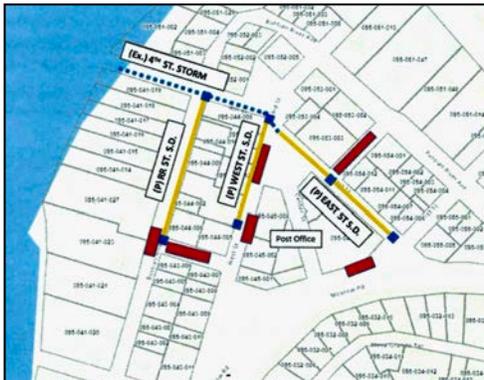
In early July we learned that FEMA was making "Flood Mitigation Grants" available to Sonoma County nonprof-

its. With our grading proposal in hand, we were able to quickly submit an application, which included support from the Villa Grande postmistress, since flooding at the post office is a continuing problem.

We also requested funding for two other projects: installation of water-permeable gravel at the 3rd street entrance to the Preserve, and control of the bamboo on the town square to

provide more parking options. The budget for the proposal includes a 20% contribution by FoVG, with the rest coming from the County.

The good news is that the grading survey has been recommended for funding, and we are awaiting final approval as we go to press. Supervisor Lynda Hopkins' office has offered to work with us on funding for the other two projects, after the fires subsided.



CALENDAR

FoVG Zoom Board Meetings
First Saturday of the Month
10:00 a.m. - Noon
To attend, email
friends@villagrande.org

CONTACTS FOR COMMITTEES

Kyla Brooke
"Carrying Capacity" of
Patterson Point Preserve
kbroke3@me.com

Katie Gibson
Better Parking Signage
and Enforcement
KatieGibson60@aol.com

Kyra Wink
Parking Permits Plan
Kyrawink.rivermac@gmail.com

Patterson Point Preserve
Restoration Volunteering
friends@villagrande.org

Online at:
villagrande.org/calendar

ON THE WEB AT
VILLAGRANDE.ORG

SPICEBUSH - CALYCANTHUS OCCIDENTALS
 Spicebush is a native deciduous shrub growing 3-13 feet tall and wide. The bright green leaves are arranged opposite, 2-6 inches long by 1-3 inches wide. The bark has a strong camphor smell when the stems are scraped. The "spice" smell from the flowers has been compared to the aroma from inside a wine barrel.

Typical of the Calycanthaceae family, the flowers lack distinct sepals and petals, but instead have spirals of tepals. The tepals are 1-3 inches broad, and range from dark red to purplish brown. The fruit is an elliptic dry capsule 2-3 inches long, containing numerous seeds. The flowers are pollinated by beetles in the Nitidulidae family, one of which can be seen in the photo. This particular bush was planted in the Preserve by the STRAW team in 2019 and is already 4' tall.

Photo: Leah Norwood



DONATION MATCH PROGRAM CONTINUES
 Our annual fundraiser did not bring any money into FoVG this year, due to Covid-19. However, we are continuing our donor match program, with funds targeted to restoration of PPP. A donor will match any contributions earmarked for the Preserve up to \$2,000. Please contact friends@villagrande.org to contribute, and thank you!

"OFF THE BEATEN PATH" IN LIMBO
 The Patterson Point "Off the Beaten Path" event that was delayed by the mandatory fire evacuations last fall is now on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Once a new date is set, everyone registered will be contacted. Stay safe!

MEMBERSHIP FORM

July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021

Renewal New

Circle one member category below:

BENEFACTOR	\$1,000	2 TICKETS TO FOVG EVENTS; UP TO 2 VOTING MEMBERS
PATRON	\$500	1 TICKET TO FOVG EVENTS UP TO 2 VOTING MEMBERS
HOUSEHOLD MEMBERSHIP	\$100	UP TO 2 VOTING MEMBERS; LIST NAMES BELOW
CONTRIBUTING MEMBER	\$50	SINGLE MEMBERSHIP
LOW INCOME	\$25	LOW INCOME

ADDITIONAL DONATION \$ _____

TOTAL PAID: Cash/Ck/PayPal: \$ _____

Last/First Name of member/household members: _____

Mail Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Local Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Propane Discount: (circle) Yes No

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Please send check and form to:

FoVG, PO Box 28, Villa Grande, CA 95486

or online through Paypal at:

villagrande.org/Membership