

The Volunteer View

The Monthly Newsletter for Marin County Civic Center Volunteers and Student Interns

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Who Spotted the Irving Fire First? A Civic Center Volunteer

By Brent Ainsworth

After a full day of enjoying stunning views of the San Geronimo Valley and West Marin hills, **Steve O’Keefe** was just about to contact Marin County Fire Department dispatchers to say he was clocking out of his volunteer shift as a fire lookout on Mount Barnabe. He’d been stationed inside the Dickson Lookout since 11 a.m. on Monday, September 10, and the clock was striking 7 p.m.

“I had my finger on the button to transmit (over the radio) that I was going out of service, and I saw white smoke over a ridge to my south,” Steve said. “It stopped me dead in my tracks. It was white smoke drifting slowly. I said, ‘This is it; I need to make a report on this.’”

Steve told dispatch that the smoke was 1 to 2 miles away and that there was a chance it could be a campfire because a campground was in that direction. “Just then,” he said, “a big cloud of smoke went up, and I thought, ‘That is no campfire.’”

Steve, a Novato resident, is a former employee union representative who retired in 2009. He is a member of the Civic Center Volunteers (CCV) program, which dates to 1979 and lines up hundreds of willing souls each year to assist county departments that provide services to customers. Volunteers play all sorts of roles to supplement the work of full-time County of Marin employees, part-timers, and seasonal workers.

“We are really lucky to have residents like Steve who share their knowledge, energy, passion, and dedication to helping others,” said **Anne Starr**, coordinator of volunteers. “They help the county provide more service to the community than would otherwise be possible.”

It was quite a service for Steve to be first to call in a wildfire on the

eastern edge of Samuel P. Taylor State Park that evening. The blaze turned into the Irving Fire, which burned 152 acres until it was 100 percent contained three days later. No structures burned and nobody was injured, but that scenario could’ve been much different. “The fact that Steve called it in and we got a response together fast gave us a good jump on it,” said Marin County

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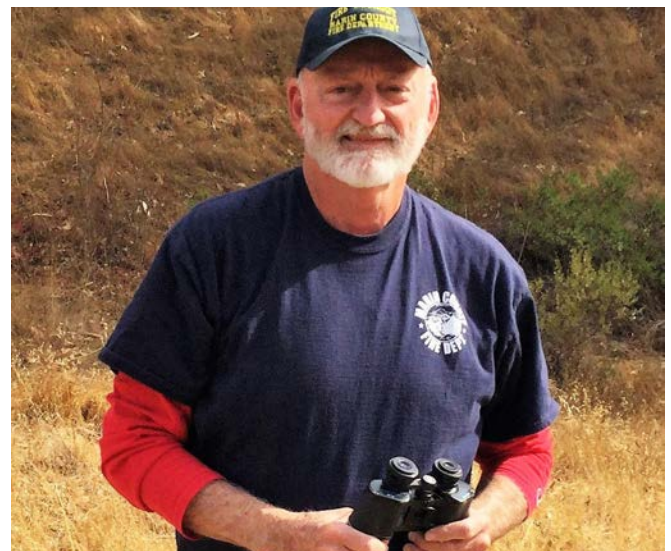


PHOTO BY SARA O’KEEFE

Fire Lookout Steve O’Keefe

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Arts & Crafts Fair Open to Volunteer Vendors

Be part of the creativity on display at the pop-up Employee Arts & Crafts Fair on Thursday, November 29, at the Marin Civic Center Café. County volunteers and interns are eligible to be vendors. Interested? Call 415-473-7407. This year, CCV **Heather Liencres** is coordinating and CCV **Annet Katan** has designed the fair poster. All are invited to save the date. Browse beautiful handmade gifts, enter a raffle, buy treats, and enjoy live music!

Free Flu Shots

Volunteers and interns can get free flu shots at the county’s Employee Health and Wellness Fair on Thursday, November 1. Supplies are limited, so first come, first served from 11:00 to 2:00 at the Marin Center Exhibit Hall, 10 Avenue of the Flags, San Rafael.

Make Your Hours Count

Log your service hours so that our program records are accurate. Did you know that 9,256 volunteers and interns contributed 250,789 hours of service in County of Marin departments during 2017-2018? We know that because you recorded your service hours. Thank you! Need help resetting your password? Please call **Robyn Madias**, 415-473-7407.

Love of Libraries Leads to Satisfying Role

By Scott Harropp

For nearly 10 years, Civic Center Volunteer **Cythea Harrison-Homitz** has served at the Fairfax Library, stopping by for a few hours each week to mend damaged books. “They say money makes the world go ‘round, but I’m convinced it’s Elmer’s glue,” she says of her work.

CIVIC CENTER VOLUNTEERS FILE PHOTO



Cythea Harrison-Homitz

Cythea has long been involved in the library world. She started the library at Tamiscal High School and was the library specialist there for 11 years. Her son, Patchen, still serves the school as a master teacher. The family’s dedication to the world of education goes back to her husband’s role as president of Laney College in Oakland.

Cythea’s mending role with Fairfax Library began at the tender age of 70. According to her staff supervisor **Anthony Puga**, “I first met Cythea in October of 2008 when she glided into the Fairfax Library offering to help mend library books.” Her skills are in high demand, he said. “On many occasions, I have been approached by some of our youngest patrons who are concerned that a page is loose or a book cover is a little worn. I am always proud to say that I have a wonderful volunteer, so let’s see if she can work her magic and save the book.”

Born in South Carolina, raised in New England and Hawaii, Cythea began

her career in corporate settings, then set herself up doing window dressing in Berkeley. She expanded into doing wardrobes and closets for business-women, eventually reorganizing small businesses as a work-flow consultant.

As she turns 80 this year, Cythea has flirted with the idea of retiring. She said with a smile that Anthony, her supervisor, tells her she can only stop being a preservationist when she can no longer find her way to the library.

The Fairfax Library is more than a volunteer venue to Cythea. Three years ago it exhibited more than 70 of her paintings. She also reads aloud from her poetry -- “mostly shared secret thoughts in the Emily Dickinson tradition” -- in the library’s wonderful Gallery Room.

Cythea exemplifies how, in the process of giving to the community, volunteering also enriches an individual’s life. As she readily admits, “I’m madly in love with our Fairfax Library and all the folks who work there.”

Irving Fire

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Fire Engineer **Henry Bustamante**, the coordinator of the volunteer lookout program. “Some time passed before the next call came in from a resident. That span of time makes a pretty big difference on how early we get our resources there and find the fire.”

Henry added, “We have fire-detection cameras and other technological tools, but sometimes human eyes catch it before our technology can.”

With strong directions from Steve, the Fire Department sent crews into the remote area to search for the ignition spot before darkness really set in. Without views of the flames from street level, one team came up to the Dickson Lookout to get Steve’s perspective, then took off to hunt down the blaze. Steve locked up and drove down to Marin County Fire headquarters in Woodacre

to turn in his lookout station keys. On the return drive, Steve saw the flames for the first time. “It looked like the Kilauea volcano with the orange sky and the flames dancing,” he said.

This is Steve’s third year as a lookout. His life experience made him a good candidate for the role. “I had been an air traffic controller, so going up in towers is second nature,” he said. “I’m a hiker and former pilot, so I like being high up. I also volunteer for Marin County Parks as an open space trail monitor, and I like being out in nature.”

What about being alone? He’s getting close to 300 hours flying solo in the hot seat. And he’s not alone in being alone: Some 35 volunteers served shifts at the county’s two towers in fiscal year 2017-2018, contributing a total of 1,650 hours.

“I’m comfortable with myself for company,” he said with a small chuckle. “People ask how I pass the time. I take my ukulele up there. In between scanning the hills, I’m singing my lungs out and it doesn’t bother anybody.” Steve also tests himself, looking out of binoculars, spreading out maps, and using a compass device called an Osborne Firefinder. He reviews local landmarks and notes where power lines are located.

Steve said it was gratifying to have made the first call on the Irving Fire. “I feel so fortunate that the smoke appeared before I had left,” he said. “I was told that only a quarter of an acre had burned by the time crews were able to get to it. Had another half hour gone by, that could’ve been ...” And his voice trailed off. Yes, it goes without saying.

Master Gardeners Team Up to Benefit Marin Residents

By Doris Gates

University of California (UC) Marin Master Gardeners **Becca Ryan** and **Doyleen McMurtry** together have volunteered over 1,400 hours to help Marin residents conserve water and maintain sustainable gardens. Since the program's inception in 2008, they have participated in Marin Garden Walks, a partnership between Master Gardeners and Marin's water districts. After training by water conservation experts, Garden Walk volunteers visit local home gardens and offer suggestions on improving irrigation practices, maintaining healthy soil, and selecting plants appropriate for Marin climates.

"Many homeowners don't know a lot about their irrigation systems and a little knowledge can go a long way to save water, money, and have healthier plants," said Becca, telling why she

loves being a Garden Walker. Doyleen added, "The most frequent finding on home visits is overwatering, and we often see over fertilizing as well." Both find it rewarding to help Marin gardeners improve their yards using science-based, environmentally friendly practices.

"Becca and Doyleen are part of a strong team of over 300 volunteers who serve Marin's backyard gardeners through a number of programs," said **David Lewis**, Director, UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE) of Marin. "Look for Marin Master Gardeners at our help desk, our numerous demonstration gardens, school and community gardens, and farmers markets." For more information on Garden Walks and other Master Gardener activities, call the UCCE office at 415-473-4204 or visit marinmg.ucanr.edu.



PHOTO BY DORIS GATES

Becca Ryan and Doyleen McMurtry at Falkirk Demonstration Gardens, San Rafael

Who's New & Welcome!

Gia Asher-Lagleva (San Rafael), Tobacco Prevention & Education Intern, Health & Human Services (HHS)

Brian Beidelman (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Laura Benavidez (Novato), Community Mental Health Intern, HHS

James Berg (San Francisco), Post-Bar Intern, Public Defender's Office

Gideon Bernstein (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

June Bernstein (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

James Burke (Kentfield), Financial Abuse Specialist Team (FAST) Volunteer, HHS

Arran Caddy (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Oscar Carbajal (North Highlands), Community Mental Health Intern, HHS

Gabriel Carsillo (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Claudia Epsha (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

Cassidy Fragakis (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

Evan Gabbard (San Rafael), District 1 Intern, Board of Supervisors

Tierney Hamilton (Richmond), Civic Center Tour Docent, Cultural Services

George Kadifa (Palo Alto), Post-Bar Intern, Public Defender's Office

Tom Kennedy (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Heather Liencres (San Rafael), Arts & Crafts Fair Coordinator and *Volunteer View* Writer, Human Resources

Katherine Mejia (Oakland), Community Mental Health Intern, HHS

Alexander Mormorunni (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Kyle Nelson (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Paul O'Driscoll (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Kasia Page (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Liza Panfilova (San Rafael), Stormwater Program, Clean Marin Intern, Public Works

Rosemary Puerto (Castro Valley), Community Mental Health Intern, HHS

Nicole Rehder (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Diane Rudden (Ross), Communicable Disease Investigation Support Volunteer, HHS

Brittany Rudolph (San Mateo), Community Mental Health Intern, HHS

Benjamin Russi (Alameda), Law School Intern, Public Defender's Office

Calvin Schrader (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Ani Serebrakian (Novato), Substance Use Prevention Intern, HHS

Sofie Shafer (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

Michael Shirado (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

Daniel Stefanic (San Francisco), Law School Intern, Public Defender's Office

Jessica Taylor (Point Reyes Station), Adopt-A-Spot Point Reyes Program, Public Works

Tate Thompson (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Nicole Tiger (Mill Valley), Post-Bar Intern, Public Defender's Office

Korina Vigil (Santa Rosa), Child Welfare Intern, HHS

Michele Woo (San Francisco), Community Mental Health Intern, HHS

Genevieve Wyatt (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

Happy Anniversary!

We congratulate these volunteers who celebrate their anniversaries this month and thank them for their involvement.

29 YEARS

Marilyn Bagshaw (San Rafael), Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services/Auxiliary Communications Service (RACES.ACS) Volunteer, Sheriff

26 YEARS

Elisabeth Sommer (San Rafael), Marin Center Usher, Cultural Services

24 YEARS

BJ Hauge (Fairfax), Marin Center Usher, Cultural Services

James Allen (Kentfield), Marin Civic Center Tour Docent, Cultural Services

22 YEARS

Olga Ballesteros (Novato), Senior Peer Counselor, Health & Human Services

20 YEARS

Bijan Karimi (Corte Madera), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Jane Slack (Stinson Beach), Aide, Stinson Beach Library

18 YEARS

Jon Pittman (Novato), Patrol Volunteer, Parks

15 YEARS

Joanne Elder (San Rafael), Administrative Aide, Human Resources

14 YEARS

Lorri Gong (Mill Valley), Steward, Parks

Charlotte Urban (Novato), Library Beyond Walls Liaison, Library

12 YEARS

Bobbie Kettler (Novato), Civic Center Tour Docent, Cultural Services, and Juvenile Hall Tutor, Probation

11 YEARS

Rich Riechel (Mill Valley), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

10 YEARS

Rochelle Newman (San Anselmo), Consumer Mediator, District Attorney's Office

9 YEARS

Timothy McDonald (San Rafael), Shelver, Novato Library

Kay Gross (Novato), Marin Center Usher, Cultural Services

8 YEARS

Brennan Angel (Greenbrae), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

7 YEARS

Kelly Sanders (Tombales), Tombales Volunteer Firefighter, Fire Department

Adam Gavzer (Belvedere), Steward, Parks

6 YEARS

Ellen Kruger (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Linda Witong (San Rafael), Investigator, Sheriff

Jane Thomason (Larkspur), Patrol Volunteer, Parks

5 YEARS

Joan Brown (Kentfield), Marin Civic Center Tour Docent, Cultural Services

Steven Sklar (Tiburon) and **Brent Carlson** (Novato), Stewards, Parks

4 YEARS

Adeline Ellison (San Rafael), California Room Assistant Archivist & Researcher, Library

3 YEARS

Diana Dreyer (Larkspur), Event Aide, Human Resources

2 YEARS

Jennifer Isaac (Tiburon), **Pamela Ross** (Greenbrae) and **Geri Quinn** (Novato), Marin Center Ushers, Cultural Services

Martha Cushman (Point Reyes Station), Tutor, Point Reyes Library

1 YEAR

Karole Calvin (Inverness), English as a Second Language Tutor, Point Reyes Library

Nicole Fuches (Greenbrae), **Elizabeth Posylkin** (Novato), **Audrey Tuck** (San Rafael), **Leah Fullerton** (Mill Valley), **Samantha Newman** (San Rafael), **Sonia Saltzman** (Mill Valley), **Georgia Lee** (San Rafael), **Claire Stephens** (Novato), **Sierra Cusick** (Woodacre), **Mia Tokarski** (Mill Valley), **Sophia Rocha** (Greenbrae), **Francesca McLaughlin** (Corte Madera), **Makena Cusick** (Woodacre), and **Maddie O'Keefe** (Mill Valley), Marin Teen Girl Ambassadors, Human Resources

Tara Alkadiry (San Francisco), **Abi Fitzgerald** (San Rafael), **Johnny Gullett** (Oakland), **Marissa Morris** (Santa Rosa), **William Timpson** (Greenbrae), **Hannah Weigand** (Novato), **Andrew Wietstock** (San Francisco), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteers, Sheriff

James Baker (Mill Valley), **Anya Cutter** (San Anselmo), **Kalyn Dawes** (Corte Madera), **Tucker Grooms** (Mill Valley), **Kate Larsen** (Fairfax), **Jackson Ronald** (Mill Valley), **Olivia Sohn** (San Francisco), **Sabrina Tripp** (Mill Valley), **Quincy Webster** (Corte Madera), **Steven Zarranandia** (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteers, Sheriff

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