Volunteer Plans Digital Access Across Marin

By Scott Harrop

Internships and volunteer roles can lead to public service positions and interesting projects that help the community. MarinShares volunteer Rebecca Woodbury’s career began this way.

After a college internship with the City of San Rafael, she was hired and took on increasing responsibilities over 10-plus years, culminating as San Rafael’s director of Digital Service and Open Government. She helped shape the Digital Marin Strategic Plan, working alongside Marin County Information Services and Technology (IST) Director Liza Massey and other leaders.

Then, planning a big personal move, Rebecca left her job with the city, but “I couldn't bear to leave Liza and the project.” The solution: become a MarinShares: County of Marin volunteer. Her volunteer title is Digital Marin co-chair. Liza is the other co-chair.

“The Digital Marin Strategic Plan is a roadmap to move us from where we are today to a better digital future,” said Rebecca. “This initiative envisions a future where everyone in Marin has access to universally available, affordable, reliable, resilient, and safe internet. They have the devices, support, and literacy to take part in the world.”

Digital infrastructure is a complex topic, addressing the digital divide, digital literacy, and physical infrastructure. The initial stages of the project focused on identifying the needs of government and other service organizations, such as nonprofits, health, and education groups.

To identify how well these are positioned, Rebecca and fellow executive steering committee members supported

Get Outside! Marintern Committed to the Great Redwood Trail

By Maddie Dabbah

Eager to make change, Bay Area native Meredith Foster is an avid participant in the fight for climate conservation.

A junior at St. Ignatius College Preparatory in San Francisco, she has been a Marintern with the Great Redwood Trail (GRT) since last June.

Projected to reach over 300 miles, the GRT will link California’s iconic San Francisco and Humboldt bays. What was once a decaying railroad is becoming an exceptional trail for hikers, bikers, and outdoor enthusiasts.

Meredith has been doing much heavy lifting by getting the word out about the GRT initiative. At just 17, Meredith is skilled with communications. Helping to support GRT social media, editing its website, and connecting with partners up the coast are only part of what she does. Though Meredith considers her role to be “behind the scenes,” it has made a visible impact.

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47 community workshops, interviews, and focus groups—plus 12 surveys. The result was “2,000 to 3,000 touchpoints” from all over Marin, she said.

In addition, a few residents with expertise offered research and analysis. “Government doesn’t always have all of the expertise in-house, and it is a testament to Liza and the county that they listened and valued these contributions,” Rebecca said. Rounding out the community effort, public and private high school students and Boy Scouts helped with surveys and more.

It quickly became apparent to Rebecca that Marin was underinvested in digital infrastructure. Perhaps surprisingly, she explained, this was not always divided along socioeconomic lines: even some affluent neighborhoods are underserved. Local organizations operate a variety of older, legacy systems, each with its own tech staff, mission, and technology. Part of the challenge is how to integrate all of these in a comprehensive strategy. “Starting from scratch would be easier,” Rebecca said.

It became clear that buy-in was needed to execute the plan. The initiative evolved into cross-sector partnerships. Each community now has its own outreach committee. “It’s more than just an infrastructure plan,” she said.

Splitting time between her Sausalito apartment and a home in Sweden with her life partner, Rebecca has volunteered 275 hours so far. Serving remotely has been “a bright spot during the pandemic.” Another plus: The Marin County Board of Supervisors adopted the Digital Marin Strategic Plan on February 1. “It’s a comprehensive view of how to function in the digital age,” Rebecca says of the plan.

A key element is integrating government with the tech environment. This requires finding alignment among competing stakeholders. The next step toward implementation is to access state and federal funding.

Rebecca, a Santa Rosa native, will continue volunteering with Digital Marin after moving permanently to Sweden next year. For now, having two locations allows comparison: “My internet connection in rural Sweden is better than my connection in Sausalito—incredibly faster and cheaper,” she reports.

“We were astounded when Rebecca left her position with the City of San Rafael and announced she was moving to Sweden,” said Advanced Systems Engineer Jeff Daniel, her volunteer supervisor in the IST Department. “We thought for sure we were going to lose our number-one volunteer—but no. Rebecca is committed to improving the lives of the digitally disadvantaged in Marin and wants to see our project through no matter what time zone she is in.”

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“Meredith’s communications work is building public awareness and support for the GRT now, while laying the groundwork to solicit future participation in community planning and volunteer opportunities,” said Kevin Wright, a principal planner for Marin County Parks.

Much of Meredith’s assignment is done electronically, making her internship viable during the pandemic. She continues to develop the GRT’s website and Twitter and Instagram accounts, accumulating hundreds of followers and viewers. Users find updates on the trail’s progress, partnerships with campaigns such as #LeaveNoTrace, and information on the Great Redwood Trail Alliance, a separate group that supports the project. Meredith also helps collect revenue for the GRT and local businesses that run along its boundaries.

“Her initiative and determination... add value to the project,” said Gustavo Goncalves, board aide to Supervisor Damon Connolly of District 1 and the staff supervisor of Meredith’s internship.

Meredith is also a member of the Corte Madera Climate Action Committee, an organization endorsed by the town council.

Balancing school, extracurricular activities, and an internship is not easy. But Meredith’s continued efforts reveal her love for climate conservation and recreation.

When asked what prompted her to intern with the trail, Meredith said that “It stood out as a transformational project. It’s a small part of a big effort, and it takes a lot of work to make good things like this happen. I wanted to be involved.”
The numbers are in for fiscal year 2020-2021. Pandemic conditions created limits, yet 3,400-plus MarinShares volunteers and unpaid Marinterns served over 180,000 hours in County of Marin departments during the fiscal year.

Although average participation declined, the Marin Medical Reserve Corps in the Health and Human Services Department nearly quadrupled in size as volunteers and interns with medical experience wholeheartedly supported the county’s pandemic response.

Another bright spot in the recently published MarinShares & Marinterns Impact Report: the number of paid interns rose by 51% and their hours increased by 14%.

Look for your department’s record in the report. For highlights of volunteer and intern involvement, see the back page.

Happy Anniversary

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

25 YEARS
Mary Bowles (Tiburon), Roger Felton (Belvedere), Helen Lindqvist (Tiburon), Rosine Reynolds (Larkspur), Stewards, Marin County Parks (Parks)

23 YEARS
Mark Nordquist (Petaluma), Air Patrol Volunteer, Marin County Sheriff’s Office (MCSO)

21 YEARS
Al Baumann (Petaluma), James Malaspina (Palm Springs), Patrol Volunteers, Parks

16 YEARS
Nora Martinis (Corte Madera), Senior Peer Counselor, Health & Human Services (HHS)

15 YEARS
Robert Eichstedt (Larkspur), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, MCSO

13 YEARS
Cara Wasden (Petaluma), Lifelong Learning Reader, Novato Library

11 YEARS
Kathryn Mitchell-Ball (San Rafael), Senior Peer Counselor, HHS

9 YEARS
Susan Buster (San Rafael), Shelver, Fairfax Library

8 YEARS
Curt Simon (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, MCSO

7 YEARS
Al Baumann (Petaluma), Steward, Parks

Robert Rowlands (Mill Valley), Thomas Strada (San Rafael), Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service/ Auxiliary Communications Service (RACES/ACS) Volunteers, MCSO

6 YEARS
Jerry Kay (Novato), Stephen Sarhad (San Rafael), RACES/ACS Volunteers, MCSO

Earl McCowen (Novato), Marty McCowen (Novato), Patrol Volunteers, Parks

5 YEARS
Nicholas Koo (El Sobrante), Chris Patella (San Francisco), Michael Synyord (Berkeley), Adam Vasquez (Larkspur), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteers, MCSO

Sydney Lundquist (Dublin), Dalynn McEwen (Novato), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteers, MCSO

4 YEARS
Rose Lupo (San Rafael), Corte Madera Creek Cleanup Volunteer, Parks

3 YEARS
Christopher Cuyler (San Rafael), Toby Fray (San Rafael), Maria Malin (San Rafael), Michael Webb (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteers, MCSO

Haydon Jamison (San Rafael), Kader Kayser (San Rafael), Fawn Zech (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteers, MCSO

Ed Remitz (Larkspur), Writing and Editing Coach, Human Resources

2 YEARS
Casey Addicks (Novato), Daegan Cutter (San Anselmo), Cadence Evans (Mill Valley), Solomon Fragakis (Larkspur), Luke Tusher (Belvedere), Kylie Voelker (Novato), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteers, MCSO

Troy Evans (Mill Valley), Brad Hartwig (San Francisco), William Kuimelis (San Anselmo), Camero Maidenberg (Oakland), Emily Morrison (Novato), Brian Nishinaga (San Rafael), Karen Rehder (San Rafael), Maria Robles (Vallejo), Max Thompson (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteers, MCSO

Matt Ford (San Rafael), Veterans Office Administrative Support Volunteer, HHS

Christian Hellwig (Mill Valley), Steward, Parks

1 YEAR
Bob Salter (Novato), Radio Communications Volunteer, Department of Public Works
Who’s New & Welcome!

Michael Cann (Mill Valley), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Marin County Sheriff’s Office (MCSO)
Ciara Cox (Point Reyes), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, MCSO
Ann Cummings (Corte Madera), Restorative Justice Project Volunteer, Probation Department
Declan Ericksen (Kentfield), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, MCSO
Daniel Felling (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, MCSO
Zadie Foskett (Mill Valley), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, MCSO
Michelle Garcilazo (San Anselmo), Law School Intern, Public Defender’s Office
Oliver Goldman (Mill Valley), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, MCSO
David Grover (Petaluma), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, MCSO
Jackson Harrison (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, MCSO
Luca Hines (Kentfield), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, MCSO

Dennis Hughes (San Francisco), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, MCSO
Mac Kayser (Mill Valley), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, MCSO
Andromeda Kelly (Mill Valley), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, MCSO
Curtiss Kim (San Anselmo), Radio Communications Volunteer, Department of Public Works (Public Works)
Desmond Kim (Mill Valley), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, MCSO
David Landa (San Anselmo), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, MCSO
Andrew LeBlanc (San Francisco), Radio Communications Volunteer, Public Works
John McConneloug (Fairfax), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, MCSO
Nicole McConneloug (Fairfax), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, MCSO
Emerson Meadows (Mill Valley), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, MCSO
Amanda Mueller (Larkspur), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, MCSO
Rahul Narang (Mill Valley), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, MCSO

Gregory Olson (Novato), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, MCSO
Yasamin Pashmineh Azar (Lincoln), Suicide Prevention Research Intern, Health & Human Services
Aidan Post (Tiburon), Pre-Law Intern, Public Defender’s Office
Raul Rodriguez Soto (Novato), Immigration Program Intern, Public Defender’s Office
Nick Slanec (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, MCSO
Shea Sorcher (Mill Valley), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, MCSO
Fred Stemmler (Mill Valley), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, MCSO
Zoe Stephens (San Anselmo), Marin Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, MCSO
Emilia Valdez (Hayward), Literacy Tutor/Reading Buddies Intern, Point Reyes Library
Frank Wang (San Francisco), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, MCSO
Kelly Weidner (San Rafael), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, MCSO