

# Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation



Winter/Spring 2011

## Celebrating Walnut Creek's 20 Years of Oak Habitat Restoration

"Oaks were considered 'trash trees'—only good for firewood—and the cattlemen didn't want us planting trees because trees meant less grass for their cattle." That's how Dick Daniel, credited with starting oak restoration in the Walnut Creek Open Space, describes the attitude toward oaks when restoration began 20 years ago.

Daniel teamed up with another tree hugger, Ralph Kraetsch, and newly-hired Walnut Creek Open Space superintendent Dan Cather, to kick off the Oak Habitat Restoration Project that two decades later boasts Kraetsch-gleaned statistics like these:

- 2500 sites in Lime Ridge, Shell Ridge and Sugarloaf Open Spaces cleared and planted with acorns.

- 2700 volunteer days contributed to the effort
- 6800 volunteer hours spent on acorn collection, planting, fencing, watering and maintenance
- 700 viable, healthy oak trees survive—a mix of blue oaks (*Quercus douglasii*) valley oaks (*Quercus lobata*), and coast live oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*)

No longer dismissed as trash trees suitable only for firewood, oaks have regained their stature as one of the most valuable trees in the state for their contributions to the biodiversity of the land. Writing in *Bay Nature Magazine* (October-December 2003), Gordy Slack notes:

*Please see "Oak Habitat Restoration" on page 2*

Celebrate 20 years of the  
Oak Restoration Project and  
Honor Our Three Founders



Saturday, March 19, 10 am  
at the Marshall Entrance  
to Shell Ridge  
(end of Marshall Drive)



Light Refreshments



10 Minute Tour to See some of  
the Oaks we Planted and Examine  
the Effects of Fire and other  
Environmental Influences



Rain or Shine



Oak Folk—Ralph Kraetsch, Dan Cather, and Dick Daniel visit one of the first trees planted by the Oak Habitat Restoration Project, a 20 year-old valley oak, south of the Sutherland entrance to Shell Ridge. Other, younger oaks planted later dot the hillside.



*Harvey Ceaser was one of the original volunteers and is still planting acorns today.*

## **Oak Habitat Restoration** *(continued from page 1)*

“According to a 1997 University of California study, California's oak woodlands harbor more biodiversity than any other major habitat type in the state: At least 4,000 kinds of insects inhabit them, along with 2,000 kinds of plants, thousands of fungi and lichens, 170 different birds, 60 amphibians and reptiles, and 100 different mammals.”

### **Founding Fathers**

Founding Fathers Daniel, Kraetsch, and Cather worked together to control and limit grazing in the Walnut Creek Open Space, recruit volunteers to help with acorn planting and maintenance, and establish Walnut Creek's restoration program as a model. Cather, who was soon promoted to Public Services Manager for the city, became too busy with other responsibilities: “I got

involved early and was enthusiastic, but after that, those two guys, and particularly Ralph, just really ran with it.”

Dick Daniel agrees: “Ralph is the mover and shaker of this whole thing. The man had a four wheel drive pickup, and that changed the character of what you could and couldn't do—carrying water, tools, materials, and people to remote planting sites. He's almost gone through his second Ford pickup dedicated to Open Space oak restoration projects.”

Along with restoring oaks, Kraetsch has done battle with others who saw uses for open space land that he deemed unsuitable. Years ago, after the city bought the Lime Ridge North property, Kraetsch remembers, “There was interest in putting a golf course in at Lime Ridge North. I took that one on, because I measured the ups and downs of this course and I didn't think many of the nine-hole types would be interested in that amount of up and down walking. So here we are with nothing of that sort planned.”

Cather, who retires from city service in April, sums up his view of the program: “It's all a net gain. There's no downside. I'm just so thankful for people like Ralph and Dick and the other volunteers. It's been just fantastic.”

Today, the all-volunteer Open Space Foundation has broadened and extended its efforts to restore not only oak habitat, but other facets of the open space too. You can read about these activities on our website, [www.wcosf.org](http://www.wcosf.org), and check out the different projects that are going on in the Open Space, from making bluebird boxes and native bee blocks, to restoring native grasses, shrubs, trees, and wildflowers at Bayberry Pond, to our own native plant nursery, and lots more. There's a project with your name on it.

*- David Ogden*



*Coast Live Oak just above Willow Spring Pond*



*Restored oaks near the Sutherland entrance to Shell Ridge*

## OPEN SPACE MANAGER'S FAREWELL

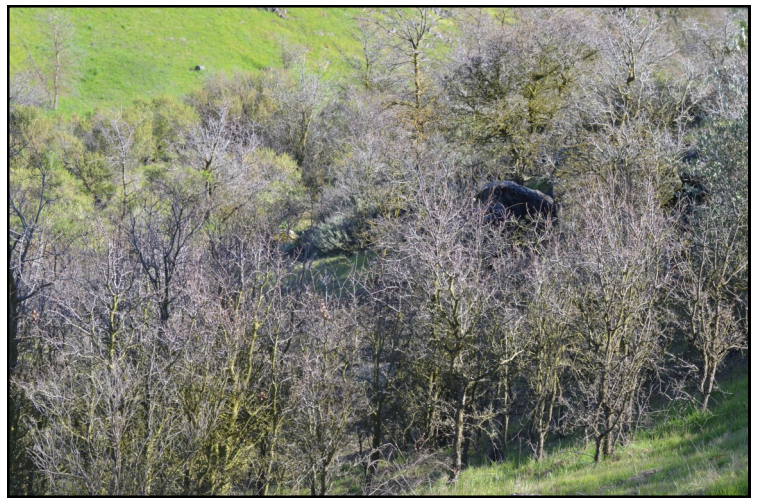
After twelve years with the County of San Diego Parks Department I joined the City of Walnut Creek as the Open Space Superintendent in February of 1991. At that time the Open Space Division consisted of Ron White, Cliff Lindquist and Dave Van Winden. The land acquired by the City for Open Space was essentially undeveloped grazing land with service roads for the ranchers' use. In 1991 we were experiencing a drought that resulted in severe over grazing which we determined was strongly impacting the success of young oak seedlings. A number of decisions were made around that period that began to set a course for what has become our current Open Space resource.

The smaller single track trails along creeks and across ridgelines were designed and built. Environmental programs were developed to engage our youth and public in the enjoyment and protection of the lands. Your Open Space Foundation funded a series of biodiversity studies to assess current conditions and plan for ongoing management choices, and a variety of restoration projects were begun by Foundation Board members which have transformed many areas of the Open Space.

I feel very fortunate to have been a part of the history of the Walnut Creek Open Space and to have had the opportunity to work with so many dedicated and creative volunteers in the Foundation. I have had experience with a number of volunteer support

organizations over the years but I have never had the pleasure of working with so many people willing, not only to share their time and ideas, but to actually invest their physical energy in the success and protection of our natural resources. The partnership between the Foundation and City has been the essential component in the progress we have experienced over my twenty years with the City of Walnut Creek and I am hopeful our progress will continue to be a source of pride in our community for many years to come.

- Dan Cather  
Open Space Manager



*After cattle grazing was removed, this forest of 12-15 foot saplings regenerated naturally from a single exceptional tree*

## Celebration and Transition



*In addition to oak restoration, Ralph started a program to control invasive species such as black mustard*

Twenty years ago, two things happened that were very important for the Open Space – Ralph Kraetsch and Dick Daniel began the Oak Habitat Restoration Project, and Dan Cather came to work here. This month we celebrate what we all have achieved in that time. I hope everyone will come on March 19 to honor these three men and celebrate 20 years of the oak restoration project.

This is also a time of transition. Dan will retire on April 1. We have had a fine partnership and we have always appreciated the trust he had in us that made it possible. It is not everyone who would treat volunteers as equal partners. Ralph has announced this is his last year as leader of the oak project; he and Dick will move to less demanding roles. Without their vision and leadership, the Foundation would not be what it is today – habitat restoration has become central to our mission.

In June, we will have another celebration – the opening of the new property on Acalanes Ridge. That will be the focus of the next newsletter.

- Lesley Hunt  
President

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**RETURN SERVICE  
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**Yes, I want to help protect and preserve Walnut Creek's Open Space**

We invite all who share this goal to join the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation. Memberships and contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowable by law. There are numerous areas where you can help. If you are interested, please drop us a note or email, or visit our website at [www.wcosf.org](http://www.wcosf.org).

**I would like to join the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email (*we never share*) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Skills I am willing to share \_\_\_\_\_

**I would like to volunteer!**

\_\_\_\_\_ Oak Restoration Project  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Native Grasses  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Quail Habitat  
 \_\_\_\_\_ School program

**MEMBERSHIPS**

<b>Benefactor.....</b>	<b>\$250</b>
<b>Sustaining.....</b>	<b>\$100</b>
<b>Family.....</b>	<b>\$40</b>
<b>Individual.....</b>	<b>\$25</b>
<b>Senior.....</b>	<b>\$15</b>

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