

# Jo Ann Hanna: Open Space Founder, Forty Years Later



David Ogden

*Jo Ann Hanna at dedication of another of her preservation projects, Gateway property at Northgate entrance to Mount Diablo State Park, in 2006, with two of her friends and collaborators, State Senator Mark DeSaulnier (left), and retired Contra Costa Times columnist Gary Bogue.*

*(Editor's note: In honor of Walnut Creek's Centennial, and the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of Walnut Creek Open Space, we asked Foundation volunteer Karen Van der Veer to profile one of our Open Space founders, Jo Ann Hanna. Here, Jo Ann recounts her role in the creation of the Walnut Creek Open Space.)*

Feisty, tireless, prescient, team player...there are so many words to describe Jo Ann Hanna, one of Walnut Creek Open Space's saviors. Imagine yourself in her shoes 40 years ago. Native born resident and chair of the Walnut Creek Planning Commission, she found to her horror that an enterprising developer had succeeded in getting necessary permits and City Council approval to lop off 90 feet from Shell Ridge to build a massive housing subdivision. "The thought of cutting the ridge made me ill," Jo Ann recalled in a recent interview. She resolved to join other residents to stop the project.

## Massive Collaboration

Once the City Council's approval of the development was overturned in a referendum, Jo Ann and her collaborators\* asked voters to approve bond issues to buy the property as a joint venture between the city and county. It was a massive grassroots outreach effort that included speaking to every service club and homeowner's association in Walnut Creek as well as Rossmoor residents. Jo Ann's description of these labors: "Glorious times!" She secured the office next door to her family's clothing store as volunteer headquarters. Although she recognizes her own phenomenal skills when it comes to organization (Who else could take over the family business at age 17 after her father dropped dead on her graduation day from high school and keep it running for another 50 years, continually in the black?), Jo Ann credits the group's leader, Audrey Bramhall, and others on the team for sharp negotiating, selfless dedication, profound insights, and essential optimism.

## Keeping It Natural

The collaboration paid off. In 1974, the bond issue passed, and they got the land—1700-acre Shell Ridge for starters—began establishing trails, and arranged for ranger housing. The 2700 acres of beautiful natural lands now preserved in four different open spaces are testimony to the mission's success. Jo Ann believes the greatest accomplishment of the open space work has been keeping it in its natural state. That was what people wanted and still want. As her longtime friend and associate, Acquisition Director Bob Pond, lay dying, he advised Jo Ann to watch the open space constantly: "As long as it's here and as long as it's fallow, it is in danger."

Jo Ann's favorite spot is Shell Ridge's Borges Ranch. Keeping that homestead in its original working condition is living history, something that really appeals to her.

*Continued on Page 2*



David Ogden

*Saturday volunteers work meticulously to plant native grasses and poppies—an average of 100 plants per person—on Fossil Hill, near Sutherland entrance to Shell Ridge.*

## Open Space Restoration Projects: An Update

In spite of the drought, plants are growing in our open spaces—and if the young, un-established plants need some human help, our project leaders and volunteers are there to pitch in. Here's the latest on our restoration projects.

### Oak Habitat

This winter's Oak Habitat Maintenance project is complete. Since November, volunteers have been meeting regularly to do fence repair and other maintenance projects around all of the remaining oaks that were planted over the last 20 years. All of the work in Lime Ridge has been completed and the group also finished various locations within Shell Ridge.

—Dick Daniel [oakhabitat@wcosf.org](mailto:oakhabitat@wcosf.org)

### Bayberry Pond

This winter we finished planting the lower triangle with native grasses, mostly stipa species. We inter-planted about 70 blue-eyed grasses which desperate animals promptly nibbled. We protected them with screens we had saved from the oak project. They recovered and are now blooming.

—Lesley Hunt [ldhunt@astound.net](mailto:ldhunt@astound.net)

### Sutherland Entrance

In January we planted 2,000 California Poppies on Fossil Hill as well as several thousand native grasses. We chose poppies in this area for a number of reasons: they are highly beneficial to insects (particularly bees), they are

*Continued on Page 2*

*(Jo Ann Hanna continued from page 1)*

So is the reintroduction of quail in 1942 after walnut ranchers nearly killed them all off so the birds wouldn't interfere with the nut crop. By restoring habitats, volunteers brought back a native resident fowl that had nearly vanished. Likewise, when confronted with the threat of a freeway through the open space, volunteers rallied to fight that project and keep the Open Space pristine. Jo Ann battled the potential encroachment without blinking an eye. "It never occurred to me that I can't do anything," she admits.

**And That's Not All**

In addition to her preservation work, Jo Ann is an accomplished painter. She and a longtime friend, Sally Bronson Ingraham, recently collaborated to create a book about Walnut Creek historical houses, *Legacy Homes and their Stories*, in celebration of Walnut Creek's Centennial. Jo Ann created paintings of the houses while Sally researched their history and wrote the copy for the book. It's available for sale at the Shadelands Ranch Historical Museum.

In a recent article in the Contra Costa Times about the new book, Jo Ann is quoted: "There's a Hanna Grove, a Hanna Lane, a Hanna Trail. The city has been very good to me, naming all those after me while I'm still alive."

The Open Space Foundation and residents of Walnut Creek are grateful to Jo Ann Hanna for her decades of dedicated service.

\*Among the many people involved in the preservation of open space land, Jo Ann Hanna credited the original incorporators of the Open Space Foundation, including Audrey Bramhall, Gary Ginder, Robert Jaspersen, Hardy Miller and Marlene White.

— *Karen Van der Veer*

*(Open space restoration continued from page 1)*

beautiful, they are noticeable to the public—which enhances the Open Space as well as the reputation of WCOSF—and they are nursemaids for the spread of native grasses and flowers. This restoration site continues to thrive and volunteer sessions are held almost every other week through May 31<sup>st</sup> (weather dependent).

—*Phil Johnson* [phil360@astound.net](mailto:phil360@astound.net)

**Indian Valley Pond**

This year has been a busy one with lots of help from great volunteers. We've been cleaning up the pond and its surroundings and expanding our restoration work. Over the last two sessions, various weeds have been removed from two areas where they were concentrated. These areas have been the focus of much of our planting efforts in 2014. We've been planting a diverse number of grasses and plan to start adding buttercup and milkweed as well. A total of 3,000 plants will be put in this season!

—*Sean Micallef* [skmicallef@astound.net](mailto:skmicallef@astound.net)

**Heather Farm**

Continuing a long tradition, we planted with student volunteers on Martin Luther King Day. This year we put in 260 native grasses near the bridge and about 30 flowers along the little creek. Later we watered the grasses and protected their roots with dead vegetation to shade them and retain moisture.

—*Lesley Hunt* [ldhunt@astound.net](mailto:ldhunt@astound.net)

**Deer Lake**

During December, anticipating (or perhaps hoping) for a somewhat normal winter, we planted all of the plants and seeds that we had for the Deer Lake area: 200 *nasella pulchra* seedlings, 10 *epilobium*, several acorns (blue and valley), and some buckeye seeds. We also re-built all but two of the cattle enclosures. Then, because of the drought, we commenced a winter watering program. The grasses, *epilobium* and last year's buckeyes are doing well.

—*Bob Simmons*  
[robertsimmons@astound.net](mailto:robertsimmons@astound.net)



**Join Us At These Upcoming Events**

The Foundation has a variety of events planned this spring from restoration projects to wildflower walks in honor of the City's Centennial celebration. Come out and join us anytime! For more information about any of these events or other ways to get involved check out our website [www.wcosf.org](http://www.wcosf.org) or email us at [contact@wcosf.org](mailto:contact@wcosf.org).

**April**

- 5th** Sutherland Native Plant Revegetation
- 6th** Centennial Wildflower/Nature Walk in Shell Ridge
- 12th** Centennial Wildflower/Nature Walk in Acalanes Ridge
- 19th** Sutherland Native Plant Revegetation
- 20th** Centennial Wildflower/Nature Walk in South Lime Ridge

**May**

- 3rd** Sutherland Native Plant Revegetation
- 4th** Centennial Wildflower/Nature Walk in Sugar Loaf
- 17th** Sutherland Native Plant Revegetation
- 31st** Sutherland Native Plant Revegetation



Walnut Creek  
Centennial presents...

## WILD FLOWER & NATURE WALKS

What's in bloom? What will flower next? Where are the flowers hiding? Come join our experts for an enlightened trek through our local wilderness. Easy pace and trails. All ages welcome. Bring hat, sunscreen, and water. Hiking boots suggested. We ask you to please sign up by emailing [contact@wcosf.org](mailto:contact@wcosf.org). For more information visit our website [www.wcosf.org](http://www.wcosf.org). Come explore this beautiful legacy!

**Shell Ridge Open Space  
Marshall Gate**  
April 6, 2014 @ 9:00 am–12:00 pm  
Meet at end of Marshall Drive,  
near Indian Valley School

**Acalanes Ridge Open Space  
Sousa Drive Gate**  
April 13, 2014 @ 9:00 am–11:00 am  
1051 Sousa Drive

**South Lime Ridge Open Space**  
April 20, 2014 @ 9:00 am–12:00 pm  
Lime Ridge sign, end of Valley Vista Rd.

**Sugarloaf Open Space**  
May 4, 2014 @ 9:00 am–11:00 am  
Meet at end of Youngs Valley Rd.

## Going Green

*Newsletter By Email*

Got Adobe Reader? Then maybe you'd like your copy of the WCOSF Newsletter in pdf form, readable on your favorite computing device. (We're still printing hardcopies too.) For a pdf version, just send us a request by email:

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### Looking Back

## Immigrant Cereghino Fells 18 Giant Oaks—By Hand

Writing about the history of Ygnacio Valley in his book, *Ygnacio Valley 1834-1970*, George Emanuels looks at the role of immigrants in settling Walnut Creek, focusing on Italian immigrant, John Cereghino:

"John Cereghino's successful rise from a non-English speaking immigrant, to a respected viticulturist owning 119 acres of fine farm land is not alone among Ygnacio valley Italians and Portuguese." After five years as a day laborer, "...in 1905, he bought 60 acres on Oak Grove Road...He purchased his last parcel in 1919, twenty acres across Oak Grove Road from his house. The forest of oak trees that was Ygnacio Valley in [Spanish land grantee] Ygnacio Sibrian's time was not entirely gone when Cereghino made his final purchase. On the twenty acres west of his house across the road, stood 19 giant oaks. Alone, he cut down 18 of them preparing to plant walnuts. He used hand saws on the limbs and dynamite to tear the roots out. He did the entire back-breaking job by himself without power tools or tractor.

"In an interview with John Cereghino's son, James, he related a statement by Ray Lamb, Sr., a neighbor, made many years ago. 'When I used to walk through the fields to school (Oak Grove, before 1895) if I turned around to look for our house after walking away no more than 200 yards, I couldn't see it for the trees.'"

## Coyote Brush: Humble But Important



*Group of female Baccharis (coyote brush) at the Foundation's Bayberry Pond restoration site. Flowers are produced from July to October and seeds dispersed from October through January, as shown here.*

Do you know which shrub in our Open Space is deer resistant, draught tolerant, wind resistant, adapted to withstand fire, good at erosion control, and is green all year? That interesting shrub is *Baccharis pilularis*, more commonly known as Coyote Bush, or Coyote Brush, a member of the Asteraceae family. It grows from Southern Washington to the Gulf of California, from the coastal areas to the hills just west of the Central Valley, in scattered areas elsewhere and can grow in elevations from 0 to 2,000 feet.

*Baccharis* is dioecious, which means it has separate male and female plants. The flowers are small and inconspicuous, but incredibly numerous. Flowers are produced from July to October and seeds are dispersed by wind (and some by animals) from October through January. White fluff can cover the ground around a producing female baccharis.

It is not certain why Coyote Bush has come to be the common name of baccharis. One suggestion for the name is that it "outsmarts difficult soil, water and wind conditions," like a wily coyote.

*Baccharis pilularis* has been studied extensively for the role it plays in its environment. Its dense branching provides nesting space and cover for birds, small animals, and insects. Its seeds are eaten by many birds, especially bushtits and white crowned sparrows. It attracts bees, butterflies, wasps and flies. The Native Americans used *Baccharis* as a general remedy drink.

This native shrub is a valuable part of the environment in our Open Space. Can you find one as you walk there?

—Linda Judd



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If you share this goal, we invite you 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. Interested? Drop us an email ([volunteer@wcosf.org](mailto:volunteer@wcosf.org)), visit our website at [www.wcosf.org](http://www.wcosf.org), or fill out the form below and mail it to: WCOSF, Box 309, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0309.

**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**  Maintain Oaks  Plant Natives  Create Wildlife Corridors

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