



The Post

News from the Claremont Wildlands Conservancy

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CWC Sets Its Sights on Saving Clara Oaks

CWC board members, in an effort led by Terry Grill, Arlene Andrew, and Lissa Petersen, are working to raise the funds to purchase 103 acres of Claremont's foothills for the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park.

The property, named Clara Oaks by its owner/developer, lies just north of The Webb Schools along Webb Canyon Road on the western border of Claremont. It comprises the last large, privately owned property in our foothills that could be developed with many housing units.

Two of the Wildlands Conservancy's main goals are to "preserve open space in Claremont's hillsides for future generations," and to help "create a continuous wilderness corridor along the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains." Situated between the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park and L.A. County's Marshall Canyon Regional Park, Clara Oaks, if acquired,



Photo: Lorraine Walter

Clara Oaks (in black, lower left) is the last large, privately-owned property in the foothills of Claremont that could be developed with many housing units.

would help form a bridge between them, extending the green corridor.

All of us in the region will find many benefits to saving this remarkable parkland. It will create a new, western entrance to the park and will immediately add two miles of trails, with more to come over time. It will preserve native habitat that is home to abundant

wildlife and to the eastern headwaters of the San Gabriel River, ideally located to recharge our groundwater. The land is also a cultural resource of the native Tongva people, who resided in a nearby village into the 1880s. As part of the park, Clara Oaks will be saved as open space in perpetuity, foreclosing the prospect of housing developments on land with a very high fire risk. (It burned in the 2003 fire.)

The owner is currently willing to sell it as an addition to the Wilderness Park for its appraised value of \$7.2 million. That's a heavy lift, but after three years of laying the groundwork, we are making tangible progress.

To raise this amount, we and

Clara Oaks Acquisition Campaign

The Claremont Wildlands Conservancy, in partnership with the Trust for Public Land, is spearheading a campaign to save the 103-acre parcel known as Clara Oaks from development and add it to the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park. The CWC is putting \$75,000 of our own funds (the bulk of our bank account) toward the purchase, and we are challenging Claremont residents and neighbors to match that amount. Raising \$150,000 does not go very far toward the \$7.2 million purchase price, but by showing community commitment, it makes it much more likely that we will succeed in obtaining the needed grants to cover the entire purchase.

Visit our website for more details: www.claremontwildlands.org/donate-to-the-cwc/

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Saving Clara Oaks (continued)

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our partner, the national nonprofit Trust for Public Land, are writing grants to governmental agencies and foundations and gaining support from our state legislators. This fall we have opened a campaign to raise local funds to demonstrate to our major grantors that the community supports the effort to save Clara Oaks. The Board of CWC

launched the local drive by pledging \$75,000--the bulk of its assets—to the purchase.

The effort to raise funds from state, county, and foundation grants and from community members is urgent because the owner has also filed an application with the City of Claremont for approval of a Specific Plan to develop 40 or more luxury homes on

the southern slopes of the property. His team is currently working with the City of Claremont on an Environmental Impact Report. It is likely that we have less than a year to secure Clara Oaks' future as an addition to Claremont's wilderness park. Please do what you can to aid in this effort!

~ Lissa Petersen

CHWP Ranger Torres Reflects on the Park in COVID-Times

CWC Board Member John Norvell met Senior Wilderness Park ranger Jaime Torres at the Mills Ave. Park entrance and chatted about the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the Park and its visitors. Jaime has been a CHWP ranger for eight years, senior ranger for five.

JN: What are the aspects of being a ranger here in this park that you like the best?

JT: I think the interaction with people. We encounter so many different people every weekend that I'm out here. So I think the interaction with people and that's really what makes this very good.

JN: What would you say have been the most challenging aspects of being a ranger in the CHWP during the COVID-19 pandemic?

JT: I think the most challenging would have to be the enforcement of certain rules that apply to the pandemic only: mask use, one-way trail hiking. You know, I think those are the greatest challenges. Having to enforce the mask rule was a real challenge for the rangers, having to stand at the front gate was a real challenge. But with that said, the cooperation that we got from the visitors was probably 90% or thereabouts, and that was pretty impressive to see.

JN: Yeah that's more than lots of places.

JT: That's more than lots of places and with minimal resistance. We didn't have to get the police involved. We didn't have to get any other groups involved and it was basically just the rangers. We're able to communicate with people and just asking them to please abide by this rule. And we got very good cooperation, but it was very challenging to do that.

JN: What would you say the park meant to people when it reopened, because it reopened with those rules fairly early on, right?

JT: Yes. So I think with the Park being open, what that meant to people was the freedom to go out and explore. You know, a lot of other places were still closed. Most gyms at that time were still closed, other facilities were closed, so that's what that meant to people, in my opinion: the ability to be able to get out of their houses and frequent the place where they can come out and do some exercise. So the City having this park open as a resource to these people who were stuck at their houses, it was huge. And I think that's also part of the reason why they were so

compliant to our requests to come out here and keep their distance from other people, one-way trekking, put your mask on—I think they understood that as long as they followed these rules, the park would remain open, which is a lot of help to us.



Photo: John Norvell

Letter From CWC's President

The Power of One, by Bryce Courtney, is one of my favorite books. In this story it is the power to believe in yourself often well beyond any latent ability previously demonstrated. In the context of this article it is the power of individuals to realize their dreams through tenacity, creativity and by inspiring others to join them in pursuit of our mission of preserving open space and ensuring public access for passive recreation.

Our board of directors is composed of individuals, each with their own particular passion. One is passionate about diversity and inclusion; another has created volunteer programs for visitors to the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park (CHWP). Facilitating a safe entrance to Evey Canyon inspires a third, and another has created edu-

cational programs for third graders to learn about the importance of open space and habitat preservation. One board member has become an expert in web design and communications; another has the attention to detail that is required to maintain our books and protect the funds many of you have donated to achieve our mission. Our secretary is able to add humor to our minutes, and we have an expert in city planning to help facilitate the many activities necessary to add parcels to our Wilderness Park. Another of our board members organized surveys of visitors to the CHWP and provided critical data used in grant applications for funds to acquire parcels available for sale. Finally, one of our members has never vacillated from the belief that we can raise \$7.2 million from state, county

and local sources to add the 103-acre "Clara Oaks" parcel to the CHWP.

The power of each vision has inspired the entire board, and we invite you to join us in any of these activities.

Finally, I offer a challenge. The board of the Claremont Wildlands Conservancy voted to pledge \$75,000 to be paid during escrow for the purchase of Clara Oaks for the Wilderness Park.

We challenge the community to match these funds. Each of you has the power to donate funds or to inspire others to donate funds so that all of us can preserve the Clara Oaks parcel as open space in perpetuity. Please go to our web site and click "Donate to the CWC" to make a donation or a pledge. I look forward to seeing you on new trails!

~ Terry Grill, CWC President

CWC Welcomes Sorrel Stielstra to Board

We are pleased to introduce the newest addition to the CWC Board of Directors: Sorrel Stielstra. Sorrel came to Claremont fifteen years ago and immediately threw herself into environmental, social, and economic justice issues through Sustainable Claremont.

Sustainability has been a lifelong passion for her ever since childhood, owing in part to her father's cutting-edge interest in energy efficiency and solar energy. She came to understand that social, economic, and environmental sustainability are linked. "You can't attend very well to any of those without understanding that," Stielstra said.

She also quickly discovered the joys of the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park when she arrived. Her major activity there is strolling with her dogs. She greatly appreciates the chance to relax and recharge.

"I just thought it was so spectacular that we had access to all of that open space with public access right above the city," said Stielstra. "It's so congested down here. It's very

crowded, and being able to go up there just feels so lucky.

"I felt really grateful to the people who had worked hard to to preserve that. We know that it all could easily have been developed. In so many places it is."

Sorrel brings us her deep non-profit and governmental expertise from Sustainable Claremont as well as from her current job with Growing Inland Achievement, a regional "cradle-to-grave" non-governmental organization focused on educational and economic equity.

All these endeavors fit together within her larger sense of mission in the world: "the caretaking and preservation of resources and quality of life for people and animals and future generations."

Welcome, Sorrel!



Photo: John Norvell

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The Claremont Wildlands Conservancy (CWC) is a non-profit, grassroots organization dedicated to keeping the foothills wild and free for all.

***The Post* is the newsletter of the
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Photo: Vicki Salazar

This kiosk under construction will greet visitors at the Mills Avenue entrance to the Wilderness Park. The display includes a large map of the Park showing the network of trails and emphasizing safety regulations. The Friends of the Wilderness Park worked with the City Staff on its design, and construction is being carried out by the Rangers.