San Jose Parks Foundation

San Jose Parks Foundation
Parks & Trails Heroes
Honorees 2015 - 2022

2015 Honoree: Linda Wilson

San Jose Parks Foundation met Linda Wilson about a month after the Foundation began operations. She was part of the leadership of a group of neighbors around Martin and Fontana Parks.

Linda was instrumental in forming the Martin-Fontana Parks Association. Her steady, calm, yet forceful leadership was essential to the battle to save hundreds of native Oak Trees from being cut down.

Linda negotiated with PG&E and eventually set up a process by which the trees are reviewed annually to deem which ones truly need cutting. Martin-Fontana Parks Association has undertaken an ongoing program of planting for the future.

2015 Honoree: Steve Holmes

Steve Holmes is one of those can-do people who decided that he would take on the task of cleaning up Los Gatos Creek and restoring the life within it, including salmon and beavers.

Steve has organized dozens of major clean-ups, enlisting the support of hundreds of volunteers, working with multiple jurisdictions, including the City, County and Water District to transform this essential waterway. Last year he added a significant part of the Guadalupe River to his territory.

Steve and his volunteers have removed over 100 tons of trash from these waterways.
2015 Honoree: Velma Million

Velma Million is kind of an unsung hero. She was the prime advocate for creating Lake Cunningham Park, one of the City's largest parks, but that only tells part of the story. Velma began with the idea of a park for the youth in her community and followed that idea through every level of advocacy, planning and approval over decades in order to see Lake Cunningham become a reality.

San Jose Parks Foundation has long revered Velma's work and embraced her as the kind of exemplary citizen. In 2015, the foundation named a special award in her honor. The Velma Million Award is given to "honor a park volunteer advocate who has a vision, a passion and perseveres under difficult circumstances while maintaining the admiration and respect of both supporters and skeptics."

2015 Velma Million Award Honoree: Larry Ames

Larry Ames has been a very active community volunteer in support of parks and trails. He has displayed the Velma Million qualities through his commitment to preserving the historic Willow Glen Trestle. Whether or not one agrees with preserving the Trestle, everyone agrees that Larry's commitment is extraordinary - spending three years fighting to preserve the Trestle - which meant raising money, reading through piles of documents, hiring an attorney, filing motions and staying with the cause long after others would have quit.

San Jose Parks Foundation admires this level of commitment, especially in an era when few people exhibit anything like it. Larry Ames is the first recipient of the Velma Million Award.
2016 Velma Million Award Honoree: Julie Riera Matsushima

Julie Matsushima led the campaign to provide accessible swings for special needs children throughout the park system. She then led the effort to plan, fund and build the first all accessible playground in San Jose.

The Rotary PlayGarden, gives children of all abilities the opportunity to play side by side. The number of visitors to this unique playground has smashed projections and expectations.

Julie received the Velma Million Award, created to honor park volunteers who have a vision, a passion and persevere under difficult circumstances while maintaining the admiration and respect of both supporters and skeptics.

2016 Honoree: Dave Fadness

Dave was recognized, posthumously, for his many years of community service, much of it devoted to beautifying his beloved Vista Park.

Dave Fadness was a community leader who would always to roll up his sleeves and get the job done.

Dave received the City’s highest Volunteer Honor a few years ago for his efforts over decades.

Every year since his passing in 2015 Vista Park hosts a “Dave Fadness Memorial Clean-up Day” to honor the legacy of community volunteering that Dave left.

PRNS staff worked tirelessly for weeks upon weeks addressing the physical damage done to parks and trails. More important is the care and support they gave to our friends and neighbors whose lives and homes were ravaged by the devastating flood.

PRNS set up shelters in various Community Centers to house residents who were flooded out of their homes and provided leadership in responding to these emergencies on site. PRNS Staff was able to move Happy Hollow animals to higher ground before the flooding occurred, and were able to save many of the beloved Koi from the flooded Japanese Friendship Garden.

2018 Honorees: Steve and Janet Wozniak

Our 2018 honorees were essentially people with dogs who sought a dog park for their beloved canines. They discovered the wonderful atmosphere and comfortable dog park at San Jose’s Butcher Park.

After becoming regulars themselves, Steve and Janet Wozniak became a part of the Friends of Butcher Dog Park, the supportive patrons who volunteered to do various tasks and also raised funds to make important improvements. Steve and Janet Wozniak took on the task of raising substantially more funds via their event, Silicon Valley Comic Con. Working with volunteers from San Jose Parks Foundation and Friends of Butcher Dog Park, Steve and Janet produced several autograph sessions over three days, raising over $23,000 for Butcher Dog Park.

There was a delay in putting on the 2018 Summer Soiree due to some schedule conflicts, and during the delay, the Board of Trustees decided to move the event to Butcher Park, the site of the extraordinary work of Steve and Janet Wozniak. It was a wonderful event.
2019 Honorees: Marsey Kahn, Jennifer Roberts and Dave Guthridge

The trio of 2019 honorees were responsible for opening up a dormant part of Thousand Oaks Park through a two-year effort to reclaim a part of this natural oak-filled park that had been left undeveloped for years.

Marsey Kahn and Jennifer Roberts, who live in the neighborhood, took it upon themselves to investigate a way to develop this section of the park. They came up with a basic strategy of creating a natural trail through the expanse, which included many oak trees. They contacted San Jose Parks Foundation to explore raising funds to accomplish this task, estimated to cost at least $35,000 to $40,000. The Foundation created the funding mechanism and became the Fiscal Sponsor of the project. Dave Guthridge, an experienced contractor joined the team, donating his building expertise.

The third essential element was the City of San Jose's Department of Parks Recreation & Neighborhood Services (PRNS), which expedited the process at every turn. The campaign started November 1, 2017 - over $70,000 was raised - and the trail opened in July, 2018.

2020 & 2021 – COVID prevents hosting the event

2022 Honoree: Antonina Ettare, Victoria Taketa and Kathleen Perkins

Summer Soiree 2022 presented by Google was a tribute to and a celebration of a beautiful park and the three local Heroes who made it happen.

There was a great turnout of people from the nearby neighborhoods and a feeling of pride and accomplishment among the attendees who honored Antonina Ettare, Victoria Taketa and Kathleen Perkins for leading the way in developing a beautiful pocket park where once there was merely an ugly wall surrounded by weeds.
San Jose Parks Foundation created a Fiscal Sponsorship that helped in the process and aided fundraising, but the hard work was done by these three volunteers.

One of the wonderful features of the mural is that the artist included the faces of children who live in the neighborhood, creating a truly community-based work of art that will last for years.