Volunteer Sandra Sellinger, Carol Brandt, Laurie Sheldon, and Tamra Peters (L-R) were honored for their contributions to the city at the September 2, 2014, city council meeting. Each received a Resolution of Appreciation. Sandra, Laurie, and Tamra are profiled in this newsletter. (Carol was the subject of an article in our August issue.)

Marin Releaf

GUARDIAN OF THE TREES

SANDRA SELLINGER has been an advocate for trees in San Rafael for a quarter of a century. As the founder of Marin Releaf, Sandra has been a major force for greening the public spaces of San Rafael; over 1,000 trees have been planted in the city as a result of her organization’s efforts.

A partnership with the City of San Rafael, Marin Releaf has planted trees in many areas including along the Point San Pedro Road median, next to Highway 101 by St. Vincent’s School, and at the Highway 101 on- and off-ramps on Smith Ranch Road.

The group also planted trees at seven city schools including Coleman, Sun Valley, Glenwood, Davidson, Venetia Valley, and Terra Linda and San Rafael High. In another significant project volunteers worked with the City of San Rafael Public Works Department to select sites for planting trees on downtown streets.

For her decades-long achievements as the leader of Marin Releaf, as well as many other volunteer contributions to the city, Sandra was honored with a Resolution of Appreciation by the city council this year. Sandra recently stepped down as leader of the organization.

Born in Oakland, Sandra and her family moved to Vashon Island near Seattle for a time before moving back...
Kermit the Frog said, “It’s not easy being green.” But volunteer Tamra Peters has made it easy, given her incredible success in helping city residents take significant steps to live greener lifestyles.

As the leader of the Resilient Neighborhoods program (RN), Tamra has motivated hundreds of individuals to reduce their carbon emissions. A project of Sustainable Marin, RN helps San Rafael meet its Climate Change Action Plan goals.

RN takes a team approach, based on the insight that doing things together is easier and a lot more fun. With team names like “Clean Air Revival” and “Fettuccine Carbonnadas,” participants can expect a lot of laughter and learning. Neighbors, coworkers or anyone who’s interested can come together to form “Eco-Teams” that meet five times over a period of weeks to learn about strategies and resources to help households reduce their carbon “footprint.”

“It’s like weight-watchers,” she says. “Each household decides how many pounds of carbon they want to lose and then selects from a menu of actions like taking shorter showers, making their homes more energy efficient, shopping locally, walking and biking more, or even buying an electric car.” Tamra notes that it’s important to reach out to households since 60% of carbon emissions in San Rafael and Marin come from residents.

The countywide program also helps participants understand how climate change has already affected our communities, as well as giving them tools to prepare for greater climate impacts in the future by building household and community resilience.

Tamra appreciates the partnership with San Rafael. “San Rafael created the first climate action plan in Marin, and reached out to support Resilient Neighborhoods.”

Tamra has racked up thousands of volunteer hours leading the program. She put in a staggering 60 hours a week to launch the program, and currently spends about half that. For her work with RN and other volunteer efforts, Tamra was recognized with a Resolution of Appreciation by the city council this year.

Environmental stewardship has been the cornerstone of Tamra’s professional life. She has spent her career working for organizations that protect the environment, including The Nature Conservancy and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

“Even when I was working in the environmental field, I was volunteering on different boards for environmental groups in my free hours. It feels good to put my energy into something I believe in.”

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Volunteer Tamra Peters leads the Resilient Neighborhoods program for Sustainable Marin.

Tamra grew up in Arlington, VA, where she was inspired by the first Earth Day in 1970. Eventually she found her way to San Francisco and moved to San Anselmo in 1987. She’s lived in San Rafael for the last 13 years with her husband, Bill Carney, and two cats, Lucky and Buffy. Bill serves as president of the board for Sustainable San Rafael. “It’s wonderful to have a spouse who cares deeply about the same things,” she says.

COASTAL CLEANUP DAY, SEPT. 2014

SAN RAFAEL, BY THE NUMBERS:

# OF CLEAN-UP SITES: 7
# OF VOLUNTEERS: 173
# PARTICIPATING GROUPS/ORG.S: 14
MILES CLEANED: 8.5
POUNDS OF TRASH REMOVED: 1,232
POUNDS OF RECYCLING REMOVED: 450
MOST UNUSUAL ITEMS: plastic guitar, plastic skeleton foot, Mickey Mouse jack-o-lantern
San Rafael Clean

EVERY LITTLE BIT ADDS UP

**Every Little Bit** adds up. This is especially true when collecting litter. Laurie Sheldon has seen this firsthand as a volunteer with San Rafael Clean (SRC), a group of individual volunteers, agencies, and businesses dedicated to keeping our city free of trash.

Laurie became a proponent of litter removal when her son was at Davidson Middle School. Thanks to bond measures, school buildings improved, but school grounds had ongoing issues with litter. Laurie made a difference by “working with others to form groups made up of students, teachers, and parents that would conduct regular campus-wide cleanups.”

Getting involved in cleanups can catch on and become a way of life. “Kids began to realize that litter is an issue everywhere and began to have pride in their environment.”

A San Rafael resident for 25 years, Laurie studied at American University and UCLA with a focus on social sciences before she became a project manager in high tech. She lives with her husband Jeffrey Ehlenbach, a tax and estate attorney in San Rafael. They have a 21-year-old son Trevor who is a senior at UC Davis.

While Laurie finds it satisfying to pick up litter and enjoys seeing the results in downtown San Rafael, she points out that it takes more than individuals picking up trash to keep San Rafael clean over the long run.

“If we can help change behavior to maintain the streets and the city,” that would make a big difference in achieving our goals.

Laurie is most proud of the relationships San Rafael Clean has formed with local businesses. Currently the group is promoting the use of pocket ashtrays through retail outlets such as Winton’s on Fourth Street. Smokers who use a pocket ashtray rather than flicking their cigarette butts onto the street are helping to reduce a non-biodegradable form of litter that is also toxic to wildlife. Street receptacles or an empty coffee cup are also great disposal options for smokers.

Over the past several years Laurie has noticed less litter on downtown streets.

“Don’t Flick It— Stick It Here!”

San Rafael Clean is distributing pocket ashtrays to local retailers to encourage responsible disposal of cigarette butts.

Join us at a San Rafael Clean meeting— monthly on 2nd Tuesdays!

**Call 415-485-3071.**
to the Bay Area, where she attended Notre Dame High School in San Francisco. She and her husband Red have one daughter, Zorina, who lives near Olympic National Forest in Washington state.

Sandra has lived in San Rafael for 38 years. After working in a landscape architect’s office in Corte Madera, she decided to work more directly with plants. She took courses in landscape construction at the College of Marin, and then began designing gardens in San Francisco and Marin. Eventually, she launched Marin Releaf, a nonprofit focused on urban forestry.

Led by a small staff, Marin Releaf had many helping hands over the years. “We had volunteers from all over the Bay Area—we even had a volunteer from the Great Lakes area.” Before retiring from Marin Releaf this spring, SELLinger regularly put in 40 hours a week with the organization.

In addition to her work in Marin, Sandra has volunteered for the City of San Francisco where she organized tree plantings on many school campuses in honor of Arbor Day.

Sandra appreciated meeting a variety of people from different walks of life during her many years as a volunteer, but it is the trees she is most proud of. After a lifetime of volunteering for Mar-

in Releaf she says it is now time to take it easy. “It’s time to pass it on to someone else; 25 years, that’s a generation.”

Sandra is currently finishing up a fine arts degree at the College of Marin. She displayed talent from an early age and loves painting portraits. “I was a national champion in water colors when I was a 10-year-old,” SELLinger said. “In high school I received a scholarship for the Academy of Art. Instead my parents sent me to floristry school up in Oregon. After about four years I had my own business in San Francisco.”

Although not active with Marin Releaf anymore, Sandra still keeps her thumb in things green, as gardening is a hobby in her own yard. Whether at home or in her community, Sandra has been a guardian of trees. “I’m watching out for the trees and the urban forest.”

She and Bill have had the privilege of traveling and seeing a lot of the world. In their home are images of wildlife they photographed while traveling in Africa. She is glad they traveled before becoming fully aware of the huge carbon emissions generated by plane travel. “It’s difficult making the decision to travel now.”

Tamra works hard to make it easy for others to be green; she isn’t the kind to sit back when so much is at risk with climate change. “Climate change is the most important issue of our time. To be able to say I helped over 425 households reduce 2.25 million pounds of carbon, that’s pretty cool.”

To learn more, contact Tamra at www.resilientneighborhoods.org.