Volunteer Marina Palma

KICKIN’ IT IN THE CANAL

Since Marina Palma has gotten involved with sports in the Canal neighborhood, she’s kicked things up a notch. She currently volunteers as coordinator of the Canal Mini Soccer League, a women’s soccer team, and a girls’ soccer clinic.

The Mini Soccer League features age-group teams (for kids ages four to 13 years old) and consists of three three-month seasons. Up to 80 kids play in the Albert J. Boro Community Center gym during the colder months, and up to 100 compete in games at Pickleweed Park in the summer.

Demand for the program, previously run by the Canal Community Council, hasn’t flagged since Marina got involved in 2010. “When parents ask ‘when is the league is going to start up again?’ it keeps me going because I see that the community needs this program, the kids need it, the parents need it.”

The program helps children get outdoors and exercise in an affordable way. Even families that cannot pay are accommodated. “Most of the apartments in the Canal don’t have backyards, so kids don’t get to play outside.” Marina also feels that youth sports helps parents bond with their children.

It’s not just about keeping the kids active, though. Last year Marina started a soccer team for mothers of youth soccer players after many expressed an interest in forming a team. Twenty-six women formed the Blue Ivy team and kicked off their first game in summer 2014 against women from the Novato Youth Center. Blue Ivy looks forward to its second season this summer.

As if that’s not enough, Marina has not just two but three balls in the air; in spring she’ll organize the third year of a softball clinic for girls ages 8–10. Twenty-five girls have been participating in the program, located at Bahia Vista School.

Marina, who learned to serve others through the example of her own grandmother, is proud to have accomplished so much as a volunteer. Key support for the programs comes from Douglas Mundo at the Canal Welcome Center, Forest Murray from Blessings Food Ministries, and Steve Mason, supervisor of the community center. Parents Humberto Vicente, Eric Barrios, and William Mazariegos play important roles as coaches in the soccer league.

Not surprisingly, Marina gets a lot of positive feedback for her work from her soccer players and coaches from other leagues. “Kids are coming back to me when they are 10 years...”
After living in Marin for 22 years, Linda Howerton-Pritchett was introduced to the Falkirk gardens when a friend brought her to a gardening workshop in Fall of 2012. Little did she know that the visit would be the first step in establishing an ongoing relationship with the gardens and the dedicated group of people who oversee them, the Marin Master Gardeners.

After the workshop she began attending monthly workshops on a regular basis, and helping out with gardening tasks. Linda also became a core volunteer in restoration of the historic greenhouse then underway, cutting and drilling holes in dozens of panes that make up its roof. The project was completed in May 2013.

A Bay Area native who grew up in San Leandro, Linda has been a resident of the Bret Harte neighborhood of San Rafael since 1989. Linda always enjoyed growing her own tomatoes as the daughter of avid gardeners, but never had time to garden much until she retired from a 30-year career as an IT tech with State Farm Insurance in 2011. She says, “I’d much rather be outside gardening than sitting inside!”

Employment at State Farm did benefit her gardening volunteerism in another way. Having accrued 80 hours as a volunteer meant Linda was eligible to apply for a $500 grant from her employer, which she successfully obtained and contributed to the Master Gardener’s purchase of an 800-gallon water reservoir for the greenhouse. Water resources are often on Linda’s mind, as one of her volunteer tasks is to take monthly water meter readings in order to track the group’s water use and check for leaks.

Linda’s volunteerism doesn’t only benefit plants. For the last couple of years as a member of Marin Sangha, she has participated in the city’s Coastal Cleanup Day, helping to clean Loch Lomond beaches near where her group meets. She’s also helped coordinate the city’s annual Make a Difference Day that has been held at Falkirk over the last two years. An avid learner, Linda is gaining construction skills by helping to build new homes for a Habitat for Humanity project in Novato.

Linda enthuses about how much she has learned from the Master Gardeners. These days she regularly...
Downtown Streets Team

STREETS TEAM REACHES ONE MILLION BUTTS

The Downtown Streets Team has reached a milestone: in less than one year, they have picked up over one million cigarette butts off the streets of San Rafael. These butts were sent to TerraCycle in New Jersey to be recycled into industrial pallets.

The Downtown Streets Team (DST) provides homeless and low-income men and women in San Rafael with the resources they need to rebuild their lives. Funded by the City of San Rafael and local businesses and nonprofits, the DST spends much of their time volunteering downtown, picking up litter, removing graffiti, and keeping San Rafael clean. They joined the San Rafael Clean Coalition in 2013 and immediately embraced the cause of cigarette litter eradication, recognizing the harm caused by this toxic waste when it enters storm drains and flows out to the Bay.

In early 2014, DST began sending cigarette butts to TerraCycle to be recycled. The program was a continuation of a pilot conducted by San Rafael Clean and St. Vincent de Paul Society Free Dining Room in 2012.

In less than one year, 1,000,000 cigarette butts were collected. Laid end to end, starting in San Rafael, they would reach Fisherman’s Wharf in San Francisco. The butts take up a space 10’ x 10’ x 10’. That’s 100 cubic feet of cigarette litter weighing in at over 375 pounds!

Andrew Hening, DST’s Marin County Regional Director, says, “I honestly never imagined we would collect so many butts so fast. I am incredibly proud of our team members’ hard work diverting this toxic litter from our creeks and waterways, while also working to show that those who are homeless can be part of the solutions to the challenges our community faces.”

Andree Jansheski, owner of Bellam Self Storage and Boxes, sponsored the program, paying DST one cent per butt: $10,000 in total. “We estimate that over 10,000 butts are littered every 3-4 days in San Rafael. We need to educate every smoker, including those we employ in our businesses, about proper disposal of cigarette butts. It’s the law, and people should take responsibility for their actions.”

San Rafael Clean will be working to install new cigarette waste receptacles downtown in the coming year. To learn more or contribute to the campaign, visit www.SanRafaelClean.org or call 415-485-3071.

—Cory Bytof
Many of the Master Gardeners have become good friends with whom she visits local natural areas and gardens.

What motivates Linda to volunteer is “helping to preserve a historic landmark for the city” and the many visitors who use it and learn from it. Her love for the people and the place is demonstrated by her ongoing care and dedication. She invites the public to enjoy the gardens on one of these beautiful winter days, and to check out the annual plant sale on Saturday, May 9th. For information about the sale or to volunteer, email agmbean@comcast.net.

—Carla Koop

Volunteer Marina Palma coordinates three different sports initiatives in the Canal neighborhood. Pictured, L to R: Forrest Murray, Marina Palma, and Humberto Vicente. Photo: Rem O’Donnelley

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helps with the herb garden and succulent garden, just a couple of the diverse plant areas on display at Falkirk. She also uses the valuable gardening knowledge she has gleaned in the last two years at home. A 200-square-foot area of her yard once dominated by junipers now flourishes with succulents and “beneficial” plants that attract birds and bees.

Linda’s life is filled with beautiful plants she never knew before, and new people as well. She says that volunteering has made her “feel much more connected to a community.”

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—Carla Koop

Reduce Litter in our Community!

Join SAN RAFAEL CLEAN

Cigarette Litter Campaign - Keep toxic butts off our streets.

Litterati - Work with local students to collect trash data & develop creative projects.

Cover Your Load Campaign - Raise awareness about the hazards of uncovered loads on trucks.

No Litter in Baseball - Keep trash off of our ballfields.

Call 485-3071 or email Carla.Koop@CityofSanRafael.org for more information.