

## SAFE TRAILS WORKSHOP: SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Thursday, September 26, 2013

Duck Club, Irvine, CA

### MELANIE BECK

#### National Park Service

Melanie Beck has been an Outdoor Recreation Planner for National Park Service, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) for the past 16 years. Her position entails trail planning, lands management and acquisition, and in-house environmental compliance. She is Team Leader for SMMNRA's forthcoming Interagency Trail Management Plan (TMP). The TMP will prescribe a long-term interagency trail network vision for the 153,250-acre national recreation area: no small undertaking, given the 475-mile public trail network with several parkland managers and use designations, and some 300 miles of unofficial or proposed trailways. As Team Leader, she has led numerous trail planning team meetings, hosted a mountain bike policy workshop for agency trail managers, and has overseen collection of "UTAP" (Universal Trail Assessment Program) data for the trail network. Melanie has a master's degree in Geography from California State University, Northridge. She has been enjoying and working the trails of the national recreation area since 1986. Learn more at:

<http://www.NPS.gov>.

### COUNCILMEMBER NANCY GARDNER

#### City of Newport Beach

Nancy Gardner was born and raised in Newport Beach, growing up in Corona del Mar, the district she now represents along the Newport Coast. She has been active in City issues over the years with a particular concern for the environment, focusing on water quality issues in her work with the Coastal/Bay Water Quality Citizens Advisory Committee and the Newport Beach chapter of Surfrider Foundation. She was co-chair of the General Plan Advisory Committee, helping shape the General Plan that was passed in 2006 and until assuming her seat on the Council was a board member of the Balboa Performing Arts Theater Foundation working to restore the historic Balboa Theater as an arts resource for the community.

### JOHN GANNAWAY

#### OC Parks

John Gannaway is currently an OC Parks Division Manager for the South Division, which includes wilderness parks, open space lands, and camping parks. This October marks 24 years with OC Parks where John has filled numerous roles. He started his career with OC Parks as Ranger I at O'Neill Regional Park and eventually was promoted to Ranger II there. While at Whiting and Casper's Wilderness Parks and Irvine Regional Park he was a Senior Park Ranger and Supervising Park Ranger. He has a bachelor's degree in Biology. Learn more at:

[www.OC Parks.com](http://www.OC Parks.com).



## **RICH GOMEZ**

### **Equestrian Trails, Inc. 357**

Rich Gomez advises businesses and organizations on how to use employee benefits to improve employee engagement and provide incentive and reward to top performers. His programs improve employee retention, and replace burnout with productivity and loyalty. His corporate experience includes executive positions with Walt Disney Imagineering, Turner Broadcasting and PolyGram Records. He graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles and holds an MBA in Technology Management. He currently resides in Trabuco Canyon, in the foothills of South Orange County, with his wife, and their lab Kodi, along with 11 horses. Rich is active in both open space preservation and the equestrian lifestyle. Spare moments are spent skiing the Rockies or fly-fishing a trout stream. Contact Rich at: [rtgomez@aol.com](mailto:rtgomez@aol.com).

## **ANDREA GULLO**

### **Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority**

Andrea Gullo is the Executive Director for the Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority and has over 18 years of professional experience in natural land management. She is experienced in coordinating and supervising projects involving trail management, construction, ranger services, outdoor education, biological studies, acquisitions, habitat restoration, and administration. She currently serves on the Board and as Festival Co-Producer of two non-profit organizations providing local and national services. She holds a master's degree in Urban Planning from UCLA and has published articles regarding human attitudes toward cougars. Contact Andrea at: [agullo@habitatauthority.org](mailto:agullo@habitatauthority.org).

## **STEVE LARSON**

### **SHARE Mountain Bike Club**

As a resident of Orange County for 50 consecutive years Steve have spent a great bit of his free time enjoying the open space the region has to offer. As an avid cyclist since childhood he has ridden all over the county on both road and dirt trails to experience the beauty of the diverse terrain. Besides riding bicycles he like to surf, ski, hike, and camp whenever possible. Being the father of two daughters who were both born and raised in Orange County, the girls were very active equestrians and had horses in several stables around the County. Now that his children are grown and one has two children of her own, Steve has expanded his role to give back to the community that has provided so much opportunity. You might see Steve in patrol jersey in Crystal Cove State Park or working on a trail with other volunteers. If you do, please stop and say hello. Learn more at: <http://SHAREMTB.com>.

## **DANIELLE LEFER, PH.D.**

### **Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy**

Danielle LeFer is the Conservation Director of the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy. She manages over 1,500 acres of open space, with 40 miles of trails. In addition, she plans and manages the habitat restoration and the invasive plant control program. Further, she has



experience developing, implementing, and maintaining trail projects. Her experience includes over 12 years designing and implementing projects, conducting habitat assessments, wildlife reconnaissance surveys, monitoring and reporting with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, universities, and non-profit organizations. She received an M.S. in Ecology and Systematic Biology from San Francisco State University where she studied the effect of seasonality of burn, soil moisture, and temperature on seed germination in chaparral. She holds a Ph.D. in Fisheries and Wildlife Science from Virginia Tech University, where she completed research comparing piping plover reproductive success under different water management regimes on the Missouri River. Learn more at: <http://www.PVPLC.org>.

## **DICK NEWELL**

### **OC Trackers**

Dick Newell is the founder of and primary instructor for Orange County Trackers which is a wildlife conservation organization. He is a volunteer member of the Irvine Ranch Conservancy Science Team and has been monitoring local wildlife through the use of wilderness cameras countywide for more than a decade. Using radio telemetry he has participated in extensive wildlife studies supporting such agencies as US Geological Survey, Cleveland National Forest, Department of Fish and Wildlife, Newport Bay Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, and Audubon, among others. He and his team recently completed the first-ever survey of the non-vascular plants (bryophytes) of Orange County and he is an avid native plant collector for science based programs. He is a prolific writer on subjects related to our local wildlife and he maintains an education website on animal behavior and tracking skills. Learn more at: [www.OCTrackers.com](http://www.OCTrackers.com).

## **TIM PERKINS**

### **Orange County Fire Authority**

Tim Perkins has 20 years in fire service and is currently a Battalion Chief in the City of Irvine. Tim has more than eight years of experience as an Urban Search and Rescue Captain off Truck 9. Truck 9 is one of the rescue trucks that lowers the rescuers from the helicopter. He has participated in many trail rescues including the recent Holy Jim Canyon rescue of Nick Cendoya and Kendal Jack. Tim also spent five years as a Crew Chief on our rescue helicopter. He has a unique background in participating as a rescuer on the ground and as a helicopter crew chief, in both rescue roles.

## **DAVID PRYOR**

### **California Department of Parks and Recreation**

David Pryor has worked within California State Parks for many years, 21 of which have been in Natural Resources and Land Management. Habitat restoration efforts have been a major activity of his including exotic invasive removal, prescriptive fires, and replacement with California natives. Within those efforts, road and trail erosion have become a big topic. An avid trail hiker, runner, and mountaineer, he's seen the effects of trail overuse in many locales, but of great concern are new illegal trails that pop up in the open spaces. Accelerated erosion due



to poorly-maintained or improperly-graded roads has been a challenge and he has worked with equipment operators to prevent erosion. A student of our local flora and fauna, he believes in the value of protecting the biodiversity hotspot that is Orange County. Learn more at: <http://www.parks.ca.gov/>.

## **DAVID RAETZ**

### **Irvine Ranch Conservancy**

David Raetz is the Deputy Director for the Irvine Ranch Conservancy, which has been providing comprehensive non-profit land management services on the open space of the historic Irvine Ranch since January 2005. These services are performed in partnership with OC Parks, City of Irvine, City of Newport Beach, California State Parks, the Irvine Company, and several other agencies leading to direct management or partnership work in more than 30,000 acres of Orange County wilderness areas. Dave is responsible for strategic planning and project management oversight for recreation and interpretation, habitat restoration and land stewardship, trail and infrastructure amenities, and business operations. Dave directs and participates in the regional publicity for the land, the organization and its various programs. In addition, he establishes and maintains community partnerships and partnership programs. Before coming to IRC, Dave spent 13 years in a number of leadership positions with Inside the Outdoors, Orange County Schools' award-winning environmental education program. He earned a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the University of Phoenix. Learn more at: <http://IRConservancy.org/>.

## **SUKI REED**

### **OC Hiking Club**

Suki Reed is an advocate for nature, outdoor education, and the need to keep America's most at-risk children active. Hiking is a passion for Suki, who hikes regularly and has climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, in Tanzania, Africa. Each year she also climbs her favorite local So Cal peaks, and Mount Whitney. When she isn't hiking, Suki enjoys kayaking, yoga, road biking, snow skiing, and horseback riding. Additionally, she has volunteered for many years with the United States Adaptive Recreation Center where she teaches handicapped children and adults how to ski. Suki is the owner of PrepMasters ([www.PrepMasters.com](http://www.PrepMasters.com)), a leading training provider with clients including: US Military, Microsoft, Blue Cross, and CARE. Suki graduated cum laude from the University of Wisconsin, Superior and holds a TESL Teaching Certificate from University of California, Irvine. In addition, she does public speaking and writes about nature and the outdoors for the OC Register. Learn more at: <http://www.OC-Hiking.com/>.

## **NORBERTO SANTANA, JR.**

### **Voice of OC**

Norberto Santana Jr., is an award-winning investigative reporter with 20 years of experience at major daily newspapers. Before founding Voice of OC in 2009, Santana was a lead investigative reporter for the Orange County Register and spent a decade covering local governments across Southern California. His work has included exposes on Orange County public safety spending,



deportation policies, and misuse of funds at the San Diego Red Cross. In addition to his experience as a journalist, the Southern California native has a master's in Latin American Studies and has worked as an elections analyst with the National Endowment for Democracy. He also has direct experience on Internet start-ups as one of the founders of CubaNet.org, a website for dissident writers inside Cuba that has operated since 1995. Learn more at: <http://www.VoiceOfOC.org>.

## **JAMES SULENTICH**

### **Nature Reserve of Orange County**

For nearly 30 years Jim Sulentic has worked in the field of conservation as a biologist, educator, planner, and manager in California, Texas, Michigan, and Costa Rica. He holds both a B.A. and M.S. in Biology from California State Universities, Fullerton and Long Beach respectively. Additionally, Jim conducted post graduate work in ecology and evolutionary biology at UCLA and the University of Houston. Jim joined the Nature Reserve of Orange County (NROC) as its Executive Director in January 2013. Prior to his tenure with NROC he served as General Manager of the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District in Monterey, and Executive Director of the Santa Lucia Conservancy in Carmel, California. Jim's experience also includes 14 years with The Nature Conservancy, where he held a variety of positions in both California and Texas, culminating as Texas State Director. Learn more at: <http://www.NatureReserveoc.org>.

## **ALISON WENSTER**

### **Into the Wild OC Trail Runs**

Alison Wenster is the Race Director for Into the Wild OC Trail Runs. The organization was started in March of 2011 and was the first to offer an organized trail running event in Orange County regional parks with permission from OC Parks, as well as, on the Irvine Ranch lands, managed by the Irvine Ranch Conservancy. The successful trust and partnership with OC Parks and the Conservancy is maintained by their ability to operate successful events which continue annually with seven races. As trail running becomes more popular the goal for Into the Wild OC Trail Runs is to bring awareness to our local trails and everything that it has to offer its users. They encourage volunteer work, safety on trails, and take pride in leaving the trails in their original state after each event. Learn more at: [www.IntoTheWildOCTrailRun.com](http://www.IntoTheWildOCTrailRun.com).

