



# Altadena Foothills

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# C O N S E R V A T O R

Newsletter of the Altadena Foothills Conservancy

Number 4 October 2002

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

*Since our December 2001 newsletter, AFC has done a tremendous amount of work toward preserving lands in Altadena. You will read the stories in this newsletter, but I want to talk about what we have done to strengthen AFC as a land conservancy. In February we went on our first Board retreat to draft our first strategic plan. We wanted to visit an established land conservancy, and were very fortunate that the Catalina Island Conservancy welcomed us—providing us with their conference room free of charge for the weekend and taking us on a tour of their Island facilities. We learned about restoration of damaged lands, the importance of hiring staff, organizing volunteers, and much else. We are very thankful to the Catalina Island Conservancy for their hospitality and to Deb Jensen, Director of Education, for taking time on a Saturday to teach us some valuable information about how land trusts can work effectively. The Board retreat was made possible by a one-time grant from the Durfee Foundation for Board development.*

*In April, Carla Slepak and I went to the Pacific Land Trust Conference, put on by the Land Trust Alliance (LTA). This wasn't the first LTA conference Board members had attended, but it was the first one I had gone to. I attended sessions ranging from how to build a better Board to fundraising, obtaining appraisals, and writing easements. It was a lot of fun to connect with other land trust people, and I learned a lot. The conference included time for regional meetings, and those of us from southern California discussed two issues: how to get major foundations to devote more of their funding to southern California land conservation, and how to increase diversity in land conservation leadership. My attendance at the conference was sponsored by a grant from Environment Now, which has given us small grants in the past to attend conferences.*

*Both of these events, the Board retreat and the Pacific Land Trust Conference, planted the seed for an exciting idea for Altadena. The Board set as a goal hiring a full-time staff person for education. Our vision is to develop an educational program for people of all ages, to increase the appreciation and awareness of Altadenans for our foothill habitat. We would like to have guided hikes for different age and ability groups, curriculum guides for teachers, a "virtual" field guide to plants, animals, hiking trails, and scenic vistas, and a lecture series. We want every school child to visit the foothills and learn something about the native habitat. To achieve this goal we are looking for a major grant or donation that would fund this program for the first three years. We will keep you posted as we make progress, and we welcome any help you may be able to provide us in grant writing for this kind of program.*

*We are excited about where we are going!*

Nancy Steele, President

## Chaney Trail Property Purchased by Trust for Public Land

On December 31, 2001, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) completed the purchase of 15 acres on Chaney Trail and Alzada Road from Bill West and the estate of Werner Mueller. The TPL made the purchase at the urging of AFC, and with the understanding that they would eventually transfer the land to the Forest Service to become part of the Angeles National Forest.

AFC Board members Rob Staehle and Lori Paul first talked to Bill West in the summer of 2001. He and co-owner Werner Mueller were interested in making a bargain sale of the land to a conservancy. In a bargain sale, the land is sold for less than its appraised value, and the seller receives a tax deduction for the difference between the sale price and the appraisal value. The land had been on the market for several months, and the owners had received several offers from potential developers, but had not yet accepted any offer. Rob and Lori talked to Bill about the value of this land to us as open space, and Bill was sympathetic to our desire to protect the habitat.

Rob and Lori next contacted Jennifer Hranilovich with TPL. The Board appointed Rob as the project manager, and gave him the go-ahead to negotiate. Then we met for the first time with Bill West, his wife Carol, and Werner Mueller. They were most interested in talking with Jennifer because, as Werner put it, she was the one with the money. At that meeting, Bill and Werner made it clear that the deal had

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## *New Conservation Plan for Altadena*

In late 1999, just as AFC was in the process of forming, we were given two urgent deadlines to develop our conservation projects. A meeting with the Trust for Public Land had been scheduled and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy was in the process of developing their Workprogram 2000. Both groups wanted to know what properties we thought were important to conserve. So we quickly developed our list of priority projects, which has served us well for the last two years.

Since then, we realized that we needed to take a more comprehensive look at open space lands in Altadena and write a more detailed plan. At our February Board retreat, we decided that a major objective was to revise and extend our plans for land conservation in Altadena. That Conservation Plan is now in draft form, and by the time you receive this newsletter it should be finished. We will let you know when it is available, if you would like a copy. We are excited about this new Conservation Plan for Altadena, and hope that this new plan will be a catalyst for achieving our goals.

to happen in 2001, and Jennifer promised to bring them an option agreement for negotiation. As you read in the last newsletter, the option agreement was signed in late October, and the sale was finalized on December 28 and recorded the 31st.

Unfortunately, in December, before the sale could be finalized, Werner Mueller passed away. His widow graciously signed all the paperwork amidst her grief, thus completing her husband's charitable act. Eventually, AFC hopes to have a marker made, honoring Bill West and Werner Mueller for preserving their land as open space for all to enjoy.

### **Sierra Club Angeles Chapter Hike on Chaney Trail Land**

On May 25th, the first public hike on the Chaney Trail parcels was held by the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club advertised this as "Chaney Trail and Millard Canyon Conservation Education Hike." Their description was: "Join us on this easy 2.5-mile hike as we contrast hillside habitat protection with nearby housing encroachment in northwest Altadena. Tour 15-acre tract and learn how it is being brought into public ownership with help of Trust for Public Land and Altadena Foothill Conservancy. Then we'll hike scenic Millard Canyon to see changes brought by the La Viña development at the edge of Angeles National Forest." There were about 25 hikers, including several AFC Board members who provided educational information about the history, flora, and fauna of the Chaney Trail and Millard Canyon areas.

### **Brush Clearing on Chaney Trail**

At the beginning of June, AFC put out the call for people to help clear brush on the portion of the Chaney Trail property adjoining Alzada Road. Over the second and third weekends in June over 20 people came out and cut dry grass and trimmed bushes. We thank everyone who volunteered their time and energy to reduce fire danger and comply



*Left: Volunteers Kirk Olgin and June Cowgill assist with brush clearance on the Chaney Trail land. Rob Staehle, Jennifer Kutner, and nine year old Samatha Olivieri (bottom left) hiking in Chaney Trail Area.*



with the brush clearance law. In addition, we are grateful to Graham Hobbs, owner of Safe & Beautiful Tree Co. (<http://wetrim.com>), who chipped all of the branches for us.

Brush clearance is a chore that we hope will gradually reduce over time as native shrubs and trees regrow on the damaged lower portion of the property. We want to assure that the land continues to be attractive habitat for bobcats, the resident species that initially made us realize that this land was important to retain as natural open space.

### **Lower Millard Canyon Update**

On the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy's (SMMC's) agenda for the evening of April 22 was an item to adopt a protection plan and award a grant to the Mountains Restoration and Conservation Authority to purchase the four parcels that make up Lower Millard. Nancy was there to testify in support (having just ended her term of office on the Advisory Committee). She waited through about two hours of testimony before getting her chance to speak, at close to 9 PM. The meeting in Temescal Canyon then lasted until midnight,



with the vote to approve both agenda items coming around 11:30 PM.

Since the land was part of an estate, and a bid had been registered already, a probate auction was set for June 28 in Pasadena. Nancy found out that the SMMC was having a hard time getting a State certified appraisal, and that they could not pay more than the State certified appraisal. The appraisal came in finally the day before the auction, with an upper limit of \$350,000. The registered bid on the property from the private party was \$299,000. Concerned that SMMC's upper bid would not be enough, AFC obtained checks and pledged to raise an additional \$50,000 if needed. As it turned out, the private party was prepared to pay much more and outbid the SMMC at just over \$400,000.

This was a devastating blow to all of us. At an auction, you must have checks in hand for 10% of your price and if you do not, the sale reverts back to the last bid. So SMMC could not bid any higher than the checks they had in hand (their checks plus AFC's). You also do not know how much each party has brought to the auction. So we do not know how much more the successful bidder (Mr. Aaron Corbett) was prepared to pay, but he was determined to have the land and was not deterred by the thought of paying \$100,000 more than his first bid.

We would like to work with the new owner to establish a trail through the land, which is badly needed. Only time and hard work will tell if we can achieve at least part of our goals for this lovely property.

#### **Owen Brown Gravesite Has a New Owner**

In April we learned that Michael Cichy of Oregon had purchased the Owen Brown gravesite land from Mary Lou Vargo. Local residents reported that a man was camping near the

grave and was telling people they were trespassing on this land. Various County officials were contacted by concerned neighbors, and they found out that the man was the new owner. Shortly after, Mr. Cichy went to Oregon, telling local residents that he would be back. He was served by the County in late July with a notice to cease camping or storing his belongings on the land, which is zoned as vacant land.

In June or early July, the grave marker, concrete slab it was set in, and the wooden fence around the grave disappeared. Mr. Cichy disclaimed responsibility, saying it happened while he was away in Oregon. He did not file a police report, and instead planted a fruit tree where the gravestone had been.

AFC will keep working on preserving this property. We hope that we can purchase the land and restore the gravesite.

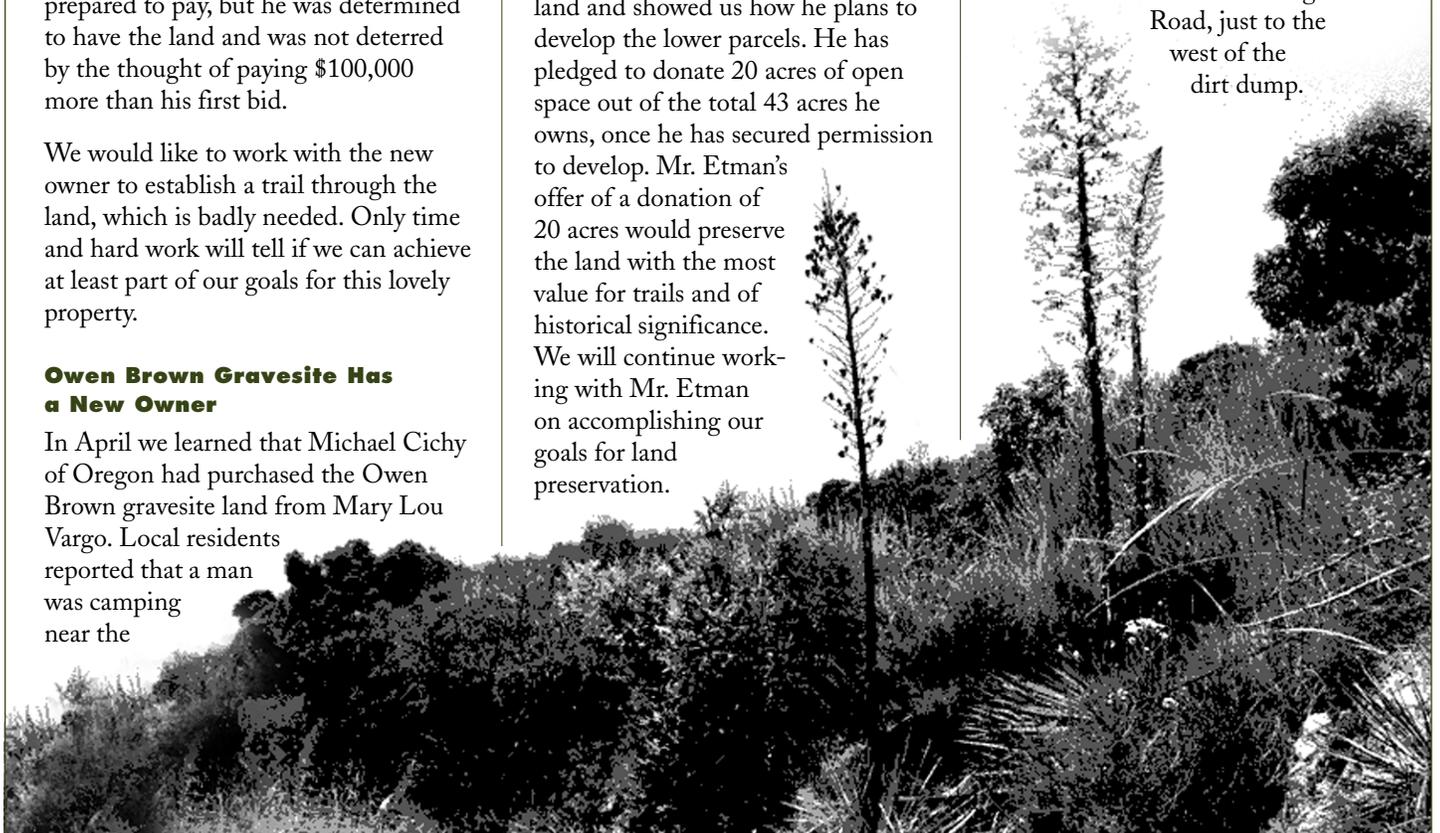
#### **Rubio Canyon Owner Offers to Donate Land**

AFC Board members have been talking with the owner of the Rubio Canyon project land, Sameer Etman. Mr. Etman took us on a tour of his land and showed us how he plans to develop the lower parcels. He has pledged to donate 20 acres of open space out of the total 43 acres he owns, once he has secured permission to develop. Mr. Etman's offer of a donation of 20 acres would preserve the land with the most value for trails and of historical significance. We will continue working with Mr. Etman on accomplishing our goals for land preservation.

#### **Lincoln Avenue SPS (Dirt Dump)**

You have probably driven or walked past the debris basin on Loma Alta east of Lincoln Avenue. You may not have been aware that, in addition to the debris basin, this is also a County "dirt dump." A dirt dump is a facility that the County uses to receive sediment from debris basins around the county, and the county had a leaseholder to manage the incoming sediment. The leaseholder was authorized to sell sediment also, thus trucks come and go with dirt.

Because of its proximity to Loma Alta Park, AFC is working with the County to get them to manage the dirt dump to benefit Altadena residents, rather than one person. We would like part of the land to be set aside for trails and a horse staging area. Ideally, the land closest to the park could be used for dumping sediment only in an emergency, in years when high rainfall causes more sediment to come down off the mountains. We would like the land to be more attractively landscaped, also. Working with the County is not simple, but now is the best time to tackle this project as the County is building a new gym near the corner of Loma Alta and Sunset Ridge Road, just to the west of the dirt dump.



# Volunteer Corner

THANKS GO TO THE MANY PEOPLE who volunteered for brush clearance and helped in other ways. If you would like to volunteer on the Natural Resources Committee, call Rob Staehle at 626-798-3235, or send him an email at [Rob@altadenafoothills.org](mailto:Rob@altadenafoothills.org). We also are very grateful to our volunteer newsletter producer, Adriane Jach, and our volunteer web master, Jeffrey George. Both do an excellent job for AFC and they are much appreciated.

We could use additional volunteers in the following areas. Contact Nancy Steele at 626-791-8458 or email her at [nsteele@altadenafoothills.org](mailto:nsteele@altadenafoothills.org).

- An experienced grant proposal writer to help us find a grant to set up an outdoor education program for Altadena.
- Office space in central Altadena, preferably free or very low cost.
- A volunteer experienced bookkeeper, especially if you have experience with non-profit GAAP or are willing to learn.
- A digital camera, 2 megapixels minimum, Sony Mavica preferred, for documenting native plants and animals in Altadena.
- Fundraising committee members to help with our Captial Campaign. Also, if you love to put on parties, we could use your help in organizing special fundraising events.

## AFC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Rick Carron is AFC's newest Board member, having joined AFC in January 2002. Rick has resided in Altadena since 1976. Upon his retirement three years ago he joined the Board of Altadena Heritage, and has now joined AFC. His interests include preservation and restoration of Altadena's great houses and neighborhoods; and Altadena's foothill environment. His technical focus within the AFC program is in the biodiversity project, an effort to catalog animal and plant species living in, and dependent upon, foothill ecosystems.

Carla Slepak recently resigned her position as a director due to lack of time. She plans to continue to volunteer for AFC.

## ALTADENA FOOTHILLS CONSERVANCY'S 2002 ANNUAL CONTRIBUTION DRIVE

I would like to renew my commitment/ or /become a new  
 Friend of the Altadena Foothills Conservancy:

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