



Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation

Meanderings

Preserving and Restoring a Public Treasure for Generations to Come

Summer 2004

Foundation to Rehabilitate Historic Stone Farm as Laguna Learning Center

With a unanimous vote of the Santa Rosa Board of Public Utilities on June 3, the Laguna Foundation has been approved to lease the historic farm buildings on the **Stone Farm** adjacent to the Laguna and just north of Occidental Road. The Foundation will rehabilitate the 1860s farmhouse and outbuildings to create the **Laguna Learning Center**: a nature center, classroom for education programs, scientific research station, and offices for the Foundation. A system of trails in the Laguna is being planned by the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, so in the future, the site could include a monitored trailhead with parking for trails.

“This is a dream come true,” said Foundation President Dan Smith. “The Learning Center at Stone Farm will be the centerpiece of a future Laguna Preserve and an educational facility that will benefit our wildlife, schoolchildren and local residents for generations to come.”

The farmhouse at Stone Farm (originally the Valentine Ranch) was built between

1862 and 1867, and is believed to be the oldest surviving farmhouse in Sonoma County which remains in its rural context. Designated a historic landmark by the Santa Rosa Cultural Heritage Board, the farmhouse, barn and outbuildings have fallen into disrepair and are currently boarded up and unoccupied. The Laguna Learning Center rehabilitation will not only create a valuable public amenity for learning about the unique wonders of the Laguna—it will preserve an important example of our local agricultural history.

Stone Farm is surrounded on several sides by lands owned by public agencies or protected by conservation easements, so the Learning Center could one day be the jewel in the crown of a Laguna Preserve. It will be a perfect place for scientists and college students to do biological research, for schoolchildren to learn about the natural richness of their local landscape and Sonoma County’s agricultural history, for hikers to learn about what they are about to see on the trail, and for birders and ecotourists to visit and enjoy.



The Laguna Learning Center at Stone Farm
(Artist's Rendition by Molly Eckler)

Already, public enthusiasm for the project is strong. Columnist Gaye LeBaron wrote a long piece about the history of the Stone Farm and its importance this past spring, and the *Press Democrat* followed with a strong endorsement editorial urging the BPU to support the proposal. Leaders from through-
(see p. 2)

Executive Director's Report—Dan Schurman



In the midst of so many exciting happenings in the Laguna and the Laguna Foundation, it's hard to know where to start in telling you about it all. Stone Farm, restoration planning, new restoration projects, our education program, scores of new supporters – the list is long and growing. As you can see from all the news in this newsletter (and from the fact that we've had to expand it just to hold it all!), tremendous things are happening. We're extremely excited and proud to be a

part of it. You should be, too, as someone who's helped make it possible.

It was a little less than two years ago when I came on board, working by myself in a small office in Sebastopol with a great team of volunteers and board members behind me. And now here we are with a staff of five (and that same great team of volunteers and board members) in a spacious office suite in downtown Santa Rosa with a large-scale Laguna restoration and management planning project underway, a perfect site secured for

a Laguna Learning Center, restoration projects under construction and more lined up for the future, a first-class education program primed for expansion, and a growing list of dedicated and influential supporters. We're perfectly poised to realize the long-dreamed-of vision of a Laguna Preserve.

I'm particularly proud of the staff team we've assembled to carry out this important work. Mark Green, Mary Abbott, Anna Sears and
(see p. 2)

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 ☆ Come Celebrate with Us!
 ☆ The Laguna Foundation will hold our first-ever annual
 ☆ fundraising event on Sunday, September 19, from 2-6 PM at the
 ☆ beautiful Vine Hill House on Vine Hill road. Featuring keynote
 ☆ remarks by local historian and media icon **Gaye LeBaron**, fine
 ☆ food, strolling entertainment, premium wines and an auction of
 ☆ Laguna-themed art created especially for this event by Sonoma
 ☆ County's most prominent artists, the **Laguna gARTen Gala**
 ☆ will be a party to remember!
 ☆ Tickets for the Gala are \$75. Seating is limited and sure to sell
 ☆ out, so get yours early! Contact Mark at 527-9277 or
 ☆ mark@lagunadesantarosa.org to reserve your tickets.
 ☆ See you there!
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Laguna Learning Center *from page 1*

out the community have taken part in shepherding this proposal through the process. We are deeply grateful to everyone who helped.

Now it falls to the Foundation to do the work! It will take considerable capital to renovate these buildings and complete the three phases of restoration and improvements planned for the site. We are now planning the capital campaign which will create the Learning Center and ensure its long term success. Expect to hear a lot more about the movement to create the Laguna Learning Center in the next few months.



Restored barn at Stone Farm (Artist's rendition by Molly Eckler)

Executive Director's Report *from Page 1*

Joe Honton are a joy and an inspiration to work with and leave no doubt in my mind that we will achieve great things for the Laguna. Add to them our stellar board, docents, and other volunteers and you can see why our confidence is running so high.

I've also been involved recently in another effort that I think will ultimately contribute significantly to the creation of the Laguna Preserve. I've been sitting as a representative from the Laguna Foundation on the Santa Rosa Plain Conservation Strategy Team, an inter-agency planning team formed at the behest of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to develop a conservation strategy for the Sonoma County population of the California tiger salamander as well as the rare, threatened and endangered vernal pool plants that exist on the Plain. The work of the group is still in progress, but I've been encouraged by the willingness of all the players to work together toward a solution that will preserve the listed species and satisfy the concerns and needs of the affected parties.

As we all know, the development pressures on the east and south sides of the plain are significant and it is my hope and belief that through this conservation process we can effectively protect and preserve in perpetuity the most sensitive areas on the plain. While it may seem odd to say that the development community will help make this possible, the reality is that they are one of the few sources of funding for this conservation. The species listing and this conservation strategy process are the mechanism through which that will happen. My aim is to make sure that the strategy arrived at ensures the protection of the species and does so in a way that expands upon and connects those natural resource lands already protected. Furthermore, the management of these preserve lands will be crucial to the success of both efforts and with the Laguna Foundation playing a leadership role I believe that we will see a Laguna Preserve and a healthier ecosystem emerge.

For those of you interested in learning more about the work of this planning team or tracking their progress, log on to <http://ci.santa-rosa.ca.us/default.aspx?PagelId=1111>, or call me and I'd be happy to discuss it with you.

Again, thanks for your generous support and caring for the Laguna. The great things we are accomplishing couldn't have happened without you.
 —Dan Schurman



Revealing the Laguna's Wonders

Mary Abbott, Education Coordinator

Education Program Report

A centerpiece of the Laguna Foundation's strategy for preserving and restoring the Laguna is our work to educate the public. As we have experienced over and over, once people come to know the Laguna's unique beauty, they'll be devoted to its conservation for life.

Our program in the schools, **Learning Laguna**, brings over 500 children into the Laguna each year with a dynamic classroom program of interactive games which teach the science of wetlands, watersheds and wildlife, along with a field trip to experience first hand the wonders of the Laguna wetlands. Our approach shares our love of nature while offering science-based learning, fulfilling California science curriculum requirements for these grades.

In the Learning Laguna program, children are given a chance to discover and awaken their enthusiasm for the natural world. Kelsey, 3rd grade says, "One of my favorite parts was making the tule fish. I love it. I also liked the turkey vulture game. I think the Canada Geese were wonderful creatures. I think the aquatic game was fun. I saw an egg sack." Or, Cooper, 4th grade: "My favorite part was looking through telescopes and seeing the bird nests and the birds themselves. The oak galls where the wasps eggs were was a really cool part! Remember to tell Raini thank you because that activity was great." The program is very popular with 3rd – 5th graders throughout the Laguna watershed and the Fall school calendar is full already. There are some spaces in the Spring 2005 program left. Please contact Raini Vallarino, Lead Docent (raini@sonic.net) if you are a teacher or parent who'd like to enroll a 3rd – 5th grade class in Learning Laguna.

The Foundation provides staffing for Learning Laguna and our Laguna Walks with volunteers trained through a 10 week course. Docents learn to conduct our classroom and field trip activities for Learning Laguna. Their education is deepened through classes given by Denise Cadman (City of Santa Rosa Natural Resource Specialist and SRJC Biology instructor) on watershed ecology, the biology of the Laguna and human impacts on the Laguna. Ben Benson of the Jesse Peters Museum gives an extensive overview of California Indian life in the Laguna. Restoration concepts are introduced by Karen Gaffney of Circuit Rider Productions. All lectures are combined with field trips to publicly held lands and restoration projects in the Laguna. Docents view birds, identify plants and develop a deeper understanding of the larger context that makes up the Laguna. Docents spend 4 mornings "shadowing" in the classroom and field trips in addition to the classes. One

docent said "It all works together. I like the way variety was mixed: classroom, field trips, shadowing." "Nothing was missing!! It felt like a college course...Every presenter was fascinating." We are proud of our training and our dedicated docents, and continue to work to make the program meaningful and fun for all involved. The next docent training session will be held in Spring 2005.

This year, we began a **continuing education program** for our group of 50 veteran docents, including events such as a Laguna nightwalk, birds and nesting, California Indian storytelling and basketry and much more.

We cannot express enough gratitude to Raini Vallarino and Carolyn "CJ" Johnson, who have crafted and staffed the docent training program for six years. These amazing volunteers are unparalleled in their dedication to sharing their love of nature with children through education. Also, special appreciation goes to Mary Ellen Lazzarini and Denise Cadman of the City of Santa Rosa for all of their help and the use of classroom facilities at the Water Treatment plant. And to the many supporters of the Laguna Foundation who have helped to make these programs possible.

For further information about our Education Programs, please contact Mary Abbott, Education Coordinator at 527-9277 or mary@lagunadesantarosa.org or visit www.lagunadesantarosa.org

Summer Walks in the Laguna

Our new docent-led hikes for adults and families have proven very popular! Foundation-trained docents will lead tours in the Sebastopol Preserve on Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings throughout the Summer. The program will continue into the Autumn months. A docent-led walk gives you the chance to ask all the questions you may have about the Laguna. **Upcoming dates are Saturday, Aug 14 (8:15 am) and Wed., Aug 25 (6:45pm). Space is limited and reservations are required. Call Mary at 527-9277 or email mary@lagunadesantarosa.org.**

Docent Class of 2004 Graduates



Congratulations Laguna Foundation 2004 Docent Class!

Front (L-R): Lead Docent Raini Vallarino, Foundation Vice-President Carolyn Johnson, Erin Sheffield, Jymmey Purtill, Bev Buswell, Christine Engel, Dottie Geiger, Jan Lochner, Education Coordinator Mary Abbott. Back: Foundation Director and Docent George Tuttle, Dan Spach, Nick Hbretov, Susan Shea, Woody Guderian, Terriann Tomlin (Class of 2002), Calvin Strobel, Jim Dempsey, Thaddeus Polen. Not shown: Nemea Arborvitae, Betsy Sanville (Photo: Dan Schurman)

The Laguna Ecosystem Restoration and Management Plan

What is it?

Funded with grants by the California Coastal Conservancy, City of Santa Rosa, Sonoma County Water Agency and Community Foundation Sonoma County, the **Laguna Ecosystem Restoration and Management Plan (RMP)** will identify priority areas for habitat restoration, define standards for restoring the varied habitats in the Laguna and for habitat creation projects such as mitigation banks, define best management practices for Laguna lands and coordinated management strategies for these lands so that they can have optimal ecological functioning, and will identify strategies for controlling invasive plants such as *Ludwigia*. The RMP will be completed in 2006.

A Value-Based Approach to Restoration

Joe Honton, Project Manager, Laguna Ecosystem Restoration and Management Plan

At a recent meeting someone asked me, "Is it really possible to restore the Laguna to the way it was?" This question points to the larger question: *what are we trying to accomplish?* The answer will drive our plans to restore the Laguna ecosystem.

One approach to restoration would look at the Laguna prior to the arrival of Europeans. That approach is called *historical ecology*, and while it is suitable in some situations, it is not pragmatic in most areas of the Laguna. Our restoration work is sparked by the desire to create a Laguna Preserve that will serve the needs of both the natural and human worlds. Instead of asking "What are we restoring to?", we begin by asking "What do we value?" This value-based approach allows us to accommodate the needs and desires of a much broader set of stakeholders.

As we meet with members of the community, we've begun to hear what these values are. Happily, everyone we've met agrees that we must preserve what is left of the Laguna's natural resources. Beyond that general statement we're hearing expressions of concern about water, open space and recreation, and habitat.

Water is a critical issue: water for anadromous fish, migratory birds, invertebrate populations, and the plant communities that support these diverse forms of life. Groundwater recharge areas. Flood control capacity. Sediment basins to trap the naturally occurring erosion of steep-sloped upland areas before it reaches the Laguna's main channel. We can engineer solutions to some water issues, but it's better to work with natural forces than against them.

Open space and recreational access to the Laguna are other values we hear a lot about. Access to the Laguna is a challenge because so much is in private ownership. People ask us where they can park, walk, ride, kayak, fish, and hunt. Clearly, access to the wonders of the Laguna is important to many, and raises concerns in others.

Habitat needs are a constant theme. Repeatedly, we're told of the need to preserve and restore the Laguna to support species of concern, some of them known to occur only here. Some encourage reintroduction of species lost over the past two centuries. Others call for eradication of exotic plants and pests which, if left unchecked, could diminish overall biodiversity to critically low levels.

But restoring habitat is about much more than individual species and problems. Our human spirit is rejuvenated when we hear the sweet melody of a thrush in the thicket. Our minds are freshened when we stand at the water's edge. Our hearts are filled when we see the wonder in our children's eyes at the discovery of nature. It is experiences like these that touch on our highest values.

Big Science in the Laguna Anna Sears, Research Director

My hands are stained black with Laguna mud today. I've been helping Lily Verdone, a graduate student at SSU, evaluate methods for removing the aquatic weed *Ludwigia hexapetala* from the Laguna. The mud stains are from a test of pulling the weeds by hand. Leaving our cars in the cow pasture, we pulled on chest-waders and pushed through shoulder-high clumps of *Ludwigia* to get to the experiment site: picture yellow flowers, lush green foliage, black mud, white egrets, and bright red crayfish. In coming months, we will also test the effects of tarping *Ludwigia* (starving them from sunlight); grazing it with livestock where the water has receded; monitoring growth rates; and testing the water depth at which it can take root, among other projects.

Ludwigia deserves this attention. While there were murmurs of concern from a few natural resource experts, *Ludwigia* only came into public awareness when the local Mosquito Abatement District learned it is a breeding ground for mosquitoes that are potential carriers of West Nile Virus. *Ludwigia* grows so densely here now that the District has to use a helicopter to distribute mosquito larvacide (a non-toxic mix of ground corn cobs and soil bacteria).

However, its impacts reach far beyond mosquitoes. *Ludwigia*'s runners reach out like blackberry vines, enveloping native wetland plants. Shallow areas are quickly swallowed up, hiding the fish, frogs and crayfish that otherwise provide a meal for egrets and herons. If *Ludwigia* isn't controlled, the biodiversity of animals and plants in our marshes will decline.

Ludwigia also may increase flooding. Since ranching began in our area, the Laguna has been filling up with sediment. As development has increased, sedimentation has accelerated: the Army



Dr. Sears (and crayfish) in a broad field of *Ludwigia*

Corps of Engineers estimates that at current rates, the flood-level of the Laguna will increase by 2-3 feet by 2050. But these estimates do not include sediment-trapping by mats of *Ludwigia*. We are working with the Corps on strategies for reducing erosion and remediating the effects of this sediment build-up. This winter we hope to measure how much sediment *Ludwigia* can capture. One idea we are exploring is the possibility of restoring the historic Lake Jonive. Besides creating flood-control capacity, this would reduce the extent of *Ludwigia*, which requires shallow water.

Our scientific collaboration is a partnership between the Laguna Foundation and the Mosquito Abatement District, which funds Lily's research. From this work, Lily will produce a thesis on *Ludwigia* ecology and control methods, and the Foundation will have specific, targeted data to develop our restoration and management plan for *Ludwigia*-infested areas. With additional collaboration from private landowners, local and state agencies, nonprofits and academic institutions, the effort to understand and control *Ludwigia* is a model of community cooperation.



Ken Kinser

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Thank You

to our generous supporters

- California Coastal Conservancy
- Community Foundation Sonoma County
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- Sandra Luce
- Nancy Peter
- Patricia Preston
- Pat and Maxine Reagh
- Peter Schurch
- Raini and Steve Vallarino
- Heidi Stewart and John Weinstein

...and all our generous members and volunteers!

You Can Care for the Laguna...Forever.


The Laguna Preserve and Learning Center the Foundation is creating will enrich our community with thriving wildlife, scenic beauty, and educational opportunities for generations to come. With these benefits come responsibilities: the Preserve will require stewardship and care for as long as water runs from the mountains to the Russian River. As we preserve and restore Laguna lands to healthy ecological functioning, create the Laguna Learning Center, and expand public awareness and appreciation for this unique jewel of our county, the Foundation must be there to protect, enhance and educate the public about the Laguna.

That's why a growing number of our supporters have included the Foundation in their philanthropy and estate planning. Planned giving to the Foundation is a way to give to the wildlife, schoolchildren and broader community of Sonoma County forever. Even what seems like a small bequest can make an enormous difference to the Laguna's future.

If you are planning your estate and would like to include the Foundation, we can help. The Foundation has supporters who are estate planning professionals and can provide you with information on a variety of ways you can meet your financial planning needs while helping our efforts.

Contact our offices for a copy of our brochure, *Planned Giving to the Laguna Foundation*. And thank you for considering a planned gift to the Laguna Foundation.

Become a Friend of the Laguna!



Founded in 1989, the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation works to preserve, restore, and provide opportunities for the public to enjoy and learn about the Laguna, Sonoma County's richest region of wild-life habitat.

The Foundation is a nonprofit organization supported by contributions and grants. IRS ID #94-3155180. All contributions are tax-deductible.

Clip and mail this coupon with your membership check to:

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I am interested in **volunteering**. Please call me for opportunities in *wildlife conservation, education and/or recreation*. (circle preferences)

Preservation Circle. I'd like to support the Laguna with a contribution of \$ _____ every quarter!



The **Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation**, founded in 1989, works to preserve, restore, and provide opportunities for the public to enjoy and learn about the Laguna de Santa Rosa, a rich and extensive complex of freshwater wetlands on the North Coast of California. The Foundation implements preservation and restoration projects, works with landowners and public agencies to protect and improve Laguna resources, conducts educational programs for children and adults, and works to develop appropriately managed recreational opportunities for the public to enjoy the Laguna.

The 14-mile Laguna is the largest tributary of the Russian River: a complex of marshes, creeks, vernal pools and oak woodlands draining a 240-square-mile watershed extending from Cotati to Windsor and Forestville. A major stop on the Pacific Flyway for migratory waterfowl, it is home to over 200 species of birds, river otter, bobcat, coyote, mountain lion, gray fox, and rare, threatened and endangered species such as California tiger salamander and Sebastopol meadowfoam. The Laguna mitigates flooding and provides critical habitat and beautiful views in the heart of the Santa Rosa Plain.

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“Swamp Dogs” on the Hunt!

Intrepid Foundation volunteers keep Laguna clean.



The Laguna Foundation's LagunaKeepers program is a corps of volunteers who help care for the Laguna in weekend workdays around the year.

The “special forces” of the LagunaKeepers, better known as the “Swamp Dogs” (Bob Oliver, Dave Schaal and Howard Weyker) are shown here preparing to raid the channel for discarded tires, bicycles and shopping carts. They wear tyvek suits to protect from ticks and poison oak as they patrol the trails for illegal camping and trash.

Want to make a difference for Sonoma County's most biologically diverse region? Join these and other inspired volunteers to beautify our Laguna. Keepers Saturday morning service dates begin in September and run through March. If the acorn harvest is good this year, we need gatherers and planters. Please call Mary Abbott, Education Coordinator at 527-9277 or send email to mary@lagunadesantarosa.org for further information.