

# Volunteers blaze new trail

## Path at Sky Ranch in Martinez hills honors Batt, founding director of Muir Heritage Land Trust

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Article Launched:

They swung their pickaxes and shovels into the hillside, they dragged their rakes along the dirt, and when it was all over, they had carved out a two-mile trail.

More than 250 volunteers came from throughout the Bay Area to create the Tina Batt Trail at Sky Ranch, off Franklin Canyon Road in the Martinez hills. The property owned by the Muir Heritage Land Trust provides a loop connecting to the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

"It's to Tina, but it's all our trail," said Linus Eukel, executive director for the Muir Heritage Land Trust.

Eukel is the successor to Batt, who stepped down in January as the organization's founding executive director and is being honored with the trail in her name.

The cooperative project between the land trust and Volunteers for Outdoor California (VOCal) -- a newly established program in the state that promotes environmental restoration and stewardship -- is the largest volunteer project undertaken by the land trust, Eukel said, and proved to be successful largely because of the outpouring of volunteers.

"Not only are they building something, but something that stands the test of time," he said. "Their great-great-grandchildren will hike this same trail. That deepens the satisfaction that people feel."

Kevin Sullivan, a group leader for one of the teams of six to 10 volunteers, said people came because they wanted to be there and that attitude was reflected in their work.

"It's amazing how much positive energy people bring out here and how much we get done," he said.

All day Saturday and part of Sunday, Sullivan's team plugged away at the hill, leveling more than 100 yards of trail.

"It's hard work, but it's fun," said Amy Stephan of Concord.

Stephan and three other engineers for Shell Oil Co. signed on for the weekend commitment, as did many others who set up camp at night June 1, or came up Saturday morning. They worked all day -- and weren't afraid to get dirty again Sunday.

But all their efforts weren't without reward.

"We made it an enticing opportunity," said Cathy Moyer, executive director of VOCal.

The traditional camp food of hot dogs and s'mores were not on the menu for the trail builders. Instead, fresh Thai cuisine and homemade desserts met the hungry campers Saturday night, as did a keg of beer, a

selection of wines, plus live music and entertainment.

Bypassing the preparations for camping can be appealing to many campers, Moyer said.

"To stumble out of your tent and have hot coffee waiting for you is a really cool thing for people who like to camp," she said.

Fresh breakfasts, lunches and snacks were also provided daily to the volunteers, who Moyer said ranged in age from 14 to 70.

"It's not just a bunch of 25-year-old strong guys," she said. "The work crew here reflects the community."

Although people from distances as far off as San Francisco and Redwood City ventured across the Bay to help out, the majority of volunteers were from Contra Costa County and regions neighboring Martinez.

Penny Johansen of Walnut Creek is an avid hiker and wanted to give back to an area she often uses. The first-time trail builder confessed that it's not easy work, as she took a break and gazed out on the rolling hills.

"But look at what you get from it," she said. "It's worth it. This is the best gift we have."

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