

The Community VOICE

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Sonoma State University and Cotati Creek Critters: A model collaboration

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By Merith Weisman August 12, 2010 11:20 am

Cotati Creek Critters (CCC) and Sonoma State University (SSU) have developed what they believe to be an ideal environmental partnership.

Students involved as academic service learners, volunteers or interns do vision-critical work, according to CCC, "to see Cotati's reach of the Laguna de Santa Rosa become a green corridor of habitat for native and migratory birds, pond turtles, frogs, butterflies and dragonflies, as well as an urban greenway with its walkways and bicycle path."

SSU students are working to make our local waterways more sustainable and accessible, while deepening their academic learning and providing Cotati Creek Critters with valuable support.

Who's involved

Students in UNIV 102, a freshmen seminar that helps them make the successful transition from high school to college, have participated in Creek Stewardship Days. According to CCC, "Thousands of volunteers have participated in planting a mile of native trees and shrubs alongside the Laguna de Santa Rosa in Cotati and a section of Rohnert Park. Our current focus is on maintaining the existing project site and adding an under-story of native grasses, sedges, and rushes. These plants will help stabilize banks, reduce soil erosion, improve water quality and provide habitat for wildlife."

Many of these volunteers are associated with SSU and students not only have a lot of energy to share, but also establish strong bonds with their peers - an important goal of the UNIV 102 class.

Students involved with Join Us Making Progress (JUMP), the hub for co-curricular community service at SSU, have also "gained much from their involvement with Creek Stewardship Days," says Jodi Roth, ASI Community Service Coordinator. Through partnering with CCC, students learn valuable lessons they cannot learn from textbooks and lectures alone.

Preparing for future careers

SSU interns plant native trees and shrubs, plant native grasses using jute netting for erosion control, weed, stake, water, prune, and propagate plants. In addition, interns who successfully complete a few Creek Stewardship Days have the opportunity to create an independent project. Some have or are currently tackling various projects, from creating a poster on the problem of plastics, to organizing a presentation and workday for children, to mapping plant locations with GPS, to beginning to create a binder of information on specific plants. The opportunities are endless, depending on the student's skills and interests.

Supervising and supporting students is a lot of work, and CCC always rises to the challenge. In addition to the work involved with student interns, service-learners, and volunteers, SSU faculty have given pro bono lectures and led field trips as part of the CCC monthly community education series. Additionally, we can always count on CCC to attend SSU events, such as the annual Volunteer & Intern Fair and the Sustainability & Community Engagement mini-conference for SSU faculty and sustainability-related community partners.

Additional support

The Center for Community Engagement (CCE) at Sonoma State University advances community-based programs. The CCE supports faculty in developing community-based teaching that integrates theory with community service and research that is inclusive of community partners and students to address local problems. By incorporating these projects into the curriculum, we teach students the theories taught in the classroom do apply to real-world issues.

The goals at the Center for Community Engagement are to support and promote high quality, reciprocal university partnerships that are firmly rooted into the curriculum through the use of service-learning as well as to foster the development of a civic perspective in education.

In alignment with the University Strategic Plan and the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan Strategic Areas, the CCE prioritizes academic community engaged initiatives that promote sustainability and multicultural competence/diversity with a focus in Roseland.

If you work with a 501c3 nonprofit or governmental organization and want to know more about collaborating with SSU or you are associated with SSU and want to know more about building collaboration with the community, e-mail cce@sonoma.edu. If you want to know more Cotati Creek Critters, visit www.cotaticreekcritters.info.

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Merith Weisman is coordinator of the Center for Community Engagement at Sonoma State University.



A horizontal banner for Sandra Geary, a real estate broker. On the left is a small portrait of her. The background is a landscape with a blue sky and green fields. The text reads: "Selling One Yard at a Time..." in a large serif font, followed by "Serving Sonoma County since 1975" in a smaller italicized serif font. Below that, in a white box, is "SANDRA GEARY - Broker/Associate - (707) 484-6579 Lic.# 00541669". On the right side of the banner is the RE/MAX PROS logo, which features a blue and red hot air balloon with the RE/MAX logo inside it.

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