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Become a Volunteer Educator at Coyote Hills Regional Park Beverly Ortiz, Docent/Volunteer Coordinator February 20, 2011

Most people know Coyote Hills Regional Park in Fremont as the graceful, low-lying, grassy hills north of the Dumbarton Bridge. Walk the park’s trails and one knows it is an area rich in human and natural history and includes the site of a more than 2,000-year-old Tuibun Ohlone village, a marshland overflowing with waterfowl and other wildlife, and a charming nectar garden created as habitat for butterflies and hummingbirds

Park Naturalists connect students and visitors to the park’s amazing cultural and natural history. Volunteer docents – this can be you – work alongside naturalists sharing enthusiasm for the topic at hand. In March and April staff will host four separate classes for those 16 or older, curious about the opportunity to introduce school children and other park visitors to Ohlone cultures past to present, or how to garden for butterflies and birds. You need not have any prior knowledge about these topics, only a desire to learn and passion for sharing what you learn during park programs and special events.

Here’s what two of the park’s current volunteer educators, called docents, have to say about their participation in the program:

Docent training takes you behind the scenes of everyday park life. Under the guidance of naturalists who are pre-eminent in their various fields, the connections between past and present are uncovered. Interest in the world around us is contagious; docent training helps us be effective in passing the story along. It also provides a most satisfying experience in meeting and working with other like-minded volunteers who participate in the program. What a great opportunity to learn and grow. Take advantage of it!

--Carol Pike

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You don't have to be a senior to volunteer at your local parks and enjoy sharing activities with students. There is such a variety of opportunities, you can choose what you're interested in, and expand into other areas. It's fascinating how local cultures shape the history of the park. When you share this with visitors, there are many hands-on activities, and cultural objects created by contemporary Ohlone peoples, that help tell the story."

--Silva Dudgeon

Serving as a nectar garden docent is the highlight of my week. It's a profound joy to be surrounded by butterflies and birds in this peaceful, beautiful place. Witnessing the process through which a tiny, delicate egg transforms into a pin-sized caterpillar and eventual butterfly has transformed my own life and perspectives about the world. I appreciate the opportunity to share this experience with others, and hopefully inspire them, as I've been inspired, to keep learning about and preserving nature.

--Barbara Doll

As an Ohlone cultures docent, you'll have an opportunity to learn about how local Ohlones lived so well for so long in the area. In addition to finding out about Ohlone cultures past to present, you'll be trained in the details of one or more Ohlone cultural skills, such as how to: (1) convert a plant called dogbane into string; (2) create fire without matches; (3) make and paddle a tule boat; (4) replicate Ohlone-style structures; (5) cook acorn soup in a basket with heated stones; or (6) fashion an arrowhead from volcanic rock. You'll have a chance to meet and work with Ohlones of all ages, and to find out how they're keeping their cultures alive while living as modern Americans.

As a nectar garden docent, you'll have an opportunity to learn: (1) fascinating facts about butterflies and hummingbirds; (2) how to create a garden that will attract these winged wonders to settle in; and (3) butterfly and hummingbird-themed crafts and activities.

Docents are part of a team of friendly, committed individuals, staff and volunteers alike, who share a passion for park history, resources, plants and animals. Docents assist Naturalists with educational programs, activities, and special events, can become involved in special projects that enhance educational programs, and are invited to field trips and workshops to update skills and knowledge and meet docents from other parks.

Your journey to become an Ohlone cultures docent begins by participating in one of two three-day training sessions, the first scheduled to occur on Thursdays, March 17, 24, and 31 from 9:30am-3:30pm; the second scheduled to occur on Sundays, April 10, 17, and 24 from 10am-2:30pm. Ohlone cultures docents must be at least 16 years of age. There is a one-time materials fee of \$35. A minimum commitment of assisting with nine Naturalist programs per year is required.

Your journey to become a nectar garden docent begins by attending one of two one-day training sessions, Thursday, March 3, or Sunday, April 3, from 10:30am-2:30pm. These sessions are free. Nectar garden docents must be 18 years of age. A minimum commitment of at least 60 hours of docent service per year (five hours per month) is required.

For more information about becoming a Coyote Hills docent, and a docent program application, please contact Coyote Hills Docent/Volunteer Coordinator Beverly Ortiz at (510) 544-3216 or bortiz@ebparks.org.