

# Friends of Stevens Creek Trail

## 2009 Annual Report



### **Mission Statement**

**The Friends of Stevens Creek Trail promotes community pride and involvement in the completion, enhancement and enjoyment of the Stevens Creek Trail and Wildlife Corridor.**

### **Executive Summary**

For the Stevens Creek Trail, 2009 was an exceptional year. For the first time since the trail was conceived in 1961, all four cities along the creek are actively working toward making it a reality, from San Francisco Bay to the Santa Cruz Mountains. We are very excited that progress is happening on all fronts -- planning, design, construction and enjoyment.

2008 finished off with the formation of a new "Joint Cities" working group, comprised of council members and staff from the four cities adjoining Stevens Creek and the Santa Clara Valley Water District. The Joint Cities group, hosted by Mountain View, recognizes the need to have a unified and coordinated plan and has been meeting quarterly to examine how to best complete and connect the Stevens Creek Trail. Recently the group agreed to support a cross-jurisdictional feasibility study of the entire area between Mountain View's planned terminus at Mountain View High School and the Cupertino section of trail that will end near Blackberry Farm Golf Course. Sunnyvale generously agreed to take the lead role. The group is currently seeking grant funding for the study.

The turnaround of policy in Sunnyvale may be the biggest news of 2009. A 1994 General Plan amendment prohibiting the Stevens Creek Trail was removed and replaced with a new, trail-friendly amendment. Sunnyvale has emerged as a strong supporter of the trail.

2009 also was a great year for additions to the Stevens Creek Trail. Mountain View opened a new bridge across Moffett Boulevard, thus eliminating the only at-grade street crossing. A half-mile trail extension was also added from El Camino Real south to Sleeper Avenue. Cupertino opened the city's first section of the Stevens Creek Trail, linking the reopened Blackberry Farm to McClellan Ranch with a half-mile-long segment made of permeable concrete. This project included a major restoration of the creek as well.

Planning for future segments of the trail is continuing in earnest. Mountain View started design on the extension over Highway 85 to Dale Avenue and Heatherstone Way and construction is fully funded, too. Cupertino is working on the northward extension of the trail from Blackberry Farm to Stevens Creek Boulevard, past Blackberry Farm Golf Course.

As the only nonprofit organization dedicated to the Stevens Creek Trail project, we are very gratified by these accomplishments and pleased that our sustained efforts helped bring them about. We are deeply grateful for the continuing support and cooperation of our many community partners, including city and county officials, volunteers, businesses, donors and other supporters. As a volunteer organization with one part-time staff member, the Friends relies heavily on the generosity and goodwill of others who share our passion and vision for the trail. The work we do would not be possible any other way.

## City-by-city Highlights in 2009

**Mountain View** added a new half-mile section of trail to their existing four miles with the opening of the Stevens Creek Trail extension to Sleeper Avenue. This extension features a great many native plants and trees along the trail as well as an oak grove with a meandering walking path.



Mountain View also opened a new bridge over Moffett Boulevard to eliminate the only street-grade crossing on the entire trail. The Friends supported a combined celebration of both openings in June by leading walkers and cyclists along the trail between the two locations.

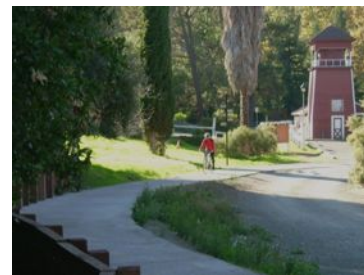


Mountain View began design of the next trail segment that continues from Sleeper Avenue south, crossing Highway 85 and connecting to Dale Avenue and Heatherstone Way. This extension is fully funded and construction will start early in 2010 with completion expected mid-2011. The Friends appreciate Mountain View City Council's steadfast commitment to the trail!

**Los Altos** paused in 2009 after several years of diligent work on a feasibility study. Sharing a common border with Sunnyvale along Stevens Creek, the city believes trail work there needs to be well coordinated. Los Altos has worked to move Joint Cities planning forward using their own feasibility study as an example. We thank their City Council for being a staunch supporter of the Friends' proposal to form a "4-city team" and making the "Joint Cities" working team a reality!

**Sunnyvale's** City Council launched a study to examine the appropriateness of its 1994 general plan amendment that prohibited the Stevens Creek Trail. It concluded with the adoption of a general plan statement: "Support proliferation of multi-use trails within Sunnyvale, and their connection to regional trails, in order to provide enhanced access to open space, to promote alternative transportation options, and to increase recreational opportunities, while balancing those needs with preservation of natural habitat, public safety, and the quality of life in residential neighborhoods." Following this change, Sunnyvale offered to take the lead on a cross-jurisdictional feasibility study. The Joint Cities team and the Friends are delighted with their leadership!

**Cupertino**, with the grand reopening of Blackberry Farm on July 4<sup>th</sup>, became the second city with a section of the Stevens Creek Trail. A new 2/3-mile-long section of trail from McClellan Road along the side of McClellan Ranch and into Blackberry Farm was part of the grand reopening. Cupertino constructed the trail surface using permeable concrete, eliminating troublesome runoff and petroleum products typical of asphalt. The trail was part of a larger project that restored the creek to a gentler slope and eliminated much concrete from the banks and streambed. The result is a wonderful, natural riparian area.



Cupertino is now in the planning stage of Phase 2, with extension of the trail north to Stevens Creek Boulevard. This may include further creek restoration and other work at the city-owned Stockmeir property. The Friends applauds the City of Cupertino for a job well done!

## **The Friends Organization**

The Friends of Stevens Creek Trail is a publicly supported 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. It was founded in December 1992 to support local efforts in the cities of Mountain View, Cupertino, Los Altos and Sunnyvale, plus the County of Santa Clara, to create a multi-use trail along Stevens Creek and its wildlife corridor. Thanks to grass-roots community action and generous donor support, approximately five miles of the trail exist today, with more under construction or planned. The Friends office is in McClellan Ranch Nature Preserve on Stevens Creek in Cupertino. The board meets there on the fourth Thursday of each month.

## **The Board of Directors**

A volunteer board of directors, typically between 9 and 15 members, governs the Friends of Stevens Creek Trail. Board members live, work or take an active interest in our creek-side communities. In 2009 we added two additional Sunnyvale board members, reflecting the growing activity in that city.

Board members during part or all of 2009 were:

Roy Verley, President (MV)  
Jeannie Bruins, Vice President (LA)  
Garth Williams, Treasurer (Svl)  
Ross Heitkamp, Secretary (MV)  
Kathy Bettman (MV)  
Tom Bornheimer (LA)  
John Brazil (MV)  
Anne Ng (Cup)  
Tim Oey (Svl)  
Alan Ross (MV)  
Fritz Stawitcke (Svl)  
Billy Symons (MV)  
Art Takahara (MV)  
Deepa Kollipara – associate (Cup)

In 2009 the board continued to implement its strategic plan, focusing on four key issues:

- 1) increasing awareness and support for the trail in upstream communities;
- 2) building our organizational capacity and upstream representation;
- 3) increasing our financial capacity;
- 4) strengthening our marketing and communication tools.

Good progress was made in each of these areas, as noted elsewhere in this report.

During the year, board members attended or made presentations at official city meetings, participated in health and environmental fairs, and represented the Friends at community events, such as art and wine festivals.

## **Executive Director**

Executive Director Aaron Grossman has deep roots with the organization. He was elected to the Friends board in 1999 and held various officer positions during an initial six-year stint. In 2005, he resigned from the board to become executive director, a part-time staff position. After nearly two years as ED, he stepped down to pursue a full-time career opportunity but was quickly re-elected to the board. Later in 2007, he was again hired into the ED position.

The Executive Director of the Friends of Stevens Creek Trail is a part-time position.

## Volunteer Programs

The Friends board continues to be very much a “hands-on” organization, with board members also serving as committee chairs, project leaders and active volunteers. Community volunteers complement and bolster these activities many times over. Volunteers are vital to the mission of the organization. With their active assistance, community outreach, fundraising, trail advocacy and special projects are greatly enhanced.

During 2009, the Friends maintained growing e-mail lists of past, current and prospective volunteers interested in trail/creek workdays or special events, such as the annual Trailblazer Race. We also attracted volunteers from local high schools, corporations, businesses and service clubs. Community outreach volunteers were invaluable in helping board members staff our information booth at community fairs in Mountain View, Sunnyvale, Los Altos and Cupertino.



We also continued to appreciate the services of key volunteers who worked on photography, signage, database and computer-related projects.

## Volunteer of the Year

Randy Rhody, a Los Altos resident and member of the city’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, was named our 2009 “Volunteer of the Year” by the board of directors. This honor was awarded among family and friends at the November Celebration of Leaders event hosted by the Mountain View Chamber of Commerce.



Randy was selected because of his years of persistent work to get a Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study launched in Los Altos. He has volunteered at the Trailblazer Race several times as a photographer and helped behind the scenes with the website. He served on the Los Altos Stevens Creek Trail Task Force and has written many letters to the Los Altos Town Crier in support of bicycling and the Stevens Creek Trail.

Volunteer-recruitment efforts continued to bring new talent and energy to the Friends. The Trailblazer Newsletter, periodic emails and our annual appeal also encouraged volunteers to sign up for various projects. Our two biggest volunteer events are the spring Trail Work Day and the fall Trailblazer Race.

## Financial Situation

Despite the economic downturn that continued into 2009, the Friends' financial position improved slightly during the year, reflecting our conservative management practices and effective fundraising efforts. Key income elements were the Trailblazer Race and our annual appeal letter.

With Microsoft Corporation continuing to support our Trailblazer Race and Walk as Presenting Sponsor, the Friends was able to secure other major sponsors and maintain the enthusiasm and spirit of the much-loved community-oriented event. Held every September on the trail, the race has been the Friends' primary means of support since its inception. The event enjoys strong support from the city of Mountain View and a loyal following of race enthusiasts. The 2010 race will be held September 26.

The Friends board of directors continued to pursue a broader and more diverse range of funding sources in 2009. Our donor base is expanding as we focus increased efforts on upstream communities, where awareness of and support for the trail can be expected to grow in future years.

## Community Outreach & Involvement

This is a fundamental part of our efforts to raise awareness about the value of Stevens Creek Trail and Wildlife Corridor as a community asset. Since our inception, we have worked closely with the City of Mountain View and with various community groups to overcome obstacles and build support for each phase of the project. These efforts continued in 2009.

With upstream communities now becoming more active in planning their own trail



routes or access points, we have stepped up our activities outside of Mountain View considerably. During 2009, we attended planning meetings, shared ideas with city

officials and established contact with grassroots organizations and other trail supporters in all upstream communities. Here is a sampling of our services and activities during 2009:

- Sending emails and providing maps, trail updates and printed materials.
- Making personal presentations to city officials, businesses, service clubs and neighborhood associations.
- Participating in local and regional conferences and workshops.
- Participating at educational fairs and events, such as "Bike to Work Day," the Challenge Bike Ride and corporate health and fitness days.
- Providing information booths at art and wine festivals in Cupertino, Los Altos, Mountain View and Sunnyvale.
- Providing trail tours and background talks for Leadership Mountain View, other cities and other groups.
- Publishing our annual report and Trailblazer newsletter for city officials and for distribution at community events.
- Developing and maintaining a brochure on the Friends and Stevens Creek Trail status.
- Updating our helpful website [www.stevenscreektrail.org](http://www.stevenscreektrail.org) with links to the City of Mountain View with the technical support of Friends board member and webmaster Ross Heitkamp.

### **Trail and Creek Work Days**

On April 25, 2009 with the very active participation of several staff members from the Mountain View Shoreline Park Department, the Friends organized another very productive Creek and Trail Clean-up Day. Dozens of volunteers gathered to collect trash, pull weeds and paint benches and fences.

Every year we attract many volunteers wishing to give back to their community by participating in this event. Volunteer teams from nearby businesses, such as Synopsys and Google, are especially helpful. Hot food and cold drinks donated by local merchants always make the event especially enjoyable.

Microsoft, Presenting Sponsor for the overall event, again generously provided the use of its campus and support staff for race-day festivities. The staff and management of the Mountain View Parks and Recreation Department provided extensive logistical support leading up to and during the event. We could not have done it without their help.

The Trailblazer Race features 10K and 5K racecourses that are officially certified by the US Track and Field Association. They run on Stevens Creek Trail, loop through Shoreline Park and circle back to the Microsoft campus. In addition to the two big runs and our more relaxed 5K trail walk, the event also includes free and popular children's races and activities.

In 2009, Race Director Aaron Grossman and former board member Ray Meyer III oversaw a hardworking race committee, made up of other board members and volunteers, who brought everything together. Except for professional race timing services, volunteers carried out all other activities, with more than 100 of them helping out.



### **Trailblazer Race 2009**

The Friends' 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Trailblazer Race and Trail Walk, held on September 27, was another great way for area residents to enjoy the trail and show their support for the Friends' mission. The event drew an estimated 1,000 participants – runners, walkers, volunteers, exhibitors and spectators. As always, the race attracted numerous repeat participants as well as many new faces to the trail.

## **Race Sponsors**

Many local businesses and individuals also provided support through financial sponsorships and in-kind donations. Along with Microsoft, they included the Star One Credit Union, Avery Construction Co., Foothill Disposal, Mountain View Kiwanis Club, Palo Alto Medical Foundation, Wal-Mart, Tori A Corbett Realty, Fenwick & West, Honu Wealth Management, The Milk Pail, Minton's Lumber, Nolte Engineering, REI Mountain View, Summer Winds Nursery, Kim Copher Realty, Richard Lowenthal, Shoreline Optometry and BMW of Mountain View. In-kind sponsors included AMR Ambulance, Hobees, the Mountain View Voice and the City of Mountain View.

## **Media Coverage and Reporting**

The Friends continued to enjoy editorial support and exposure in local and regional newspapers. Papers featuring Stevens Creek Trail or the Friends of Stevens Creek Trail included the San Jose Mercury News, Cupertino Courier, Los Altos Town Crier, Sunnyvale Sun, Mountain View Voice and the Palo Alto Daily News. We encourage reporters from local papers to call on the Friends for information or comments on creek- and trail-related stories.

The Friends also served as a resource to other neighborhood groups, nonprofit organizations and public agencies, helping to connect them with sources of information, volunteers or donations that could be of further benefit to the community.

Several individual board members and Executive Director Aaron Grossman spoke at city and community meetings in support of the trail, describing benefits already seen

along the completed sections of trail in Mountain View and Cupertino.

## **Advocacy**

The Friends' policy is to support the efforts of public agencies in planning, funding, constructing and maintaining Stevens Creek Trail. In all of our efforts to advocate for the trail, we try to consider and respect the views of varying interests along the creek.

While advocating passionately for the extension of the trail, the Friends does not take a position on any specific alignment. We meet periodically with city staff to discuss any issues they may have about the existing trail. This includes trail safety, environmental preservation and public access.

In 2009, we continued this process in Mountain View and Cupertino, where our past efforts have helped win approval, segment by segment, for construction of the trail. We also focused increased attention on Los Altos and Sunnyvale. Passage through one or both of these communities will be required to connect the Mountain View and Cupertino portions of the trail. The Joint Cities meeting and joint planning process described in the Executive Summary of this report are a direct reflection of the efforts we've made over the years to promote the trail as a regional asset.

## What's Ahead

In 2010 we look forward to working closely with all four creek-side cities on the regional (Joint Cities) planning initiative launched in December 2008. In addition, we will be supporting, participating in or actively monitoring the following projects:

- Mountain View: design and construction of the trail extension from the current end at Sleeper Avenue, over Highway 85 to the corner of Dale Avenue and Heatherstone Way.
- Cupertino: design and construction of the trail extension from the current end at Blackberry Farm to Stevens Creek Boulevard.
- Sunnyvale: taking the lead role in the Joint Cities search for grant funding for a feasibility study of the area between Cupertino and Mountain View.
- Los Altos: co-leaders of the Joint Cities planning process; determination of the qualities they want in the Stevens Creek Trail.

We will also organize more volunteer creek and trail workdays and explore other projects along the creek corridor. We will continue to advocate for the trail and the wildlife corridor and promote education and understanding of both as part of our outreach activities.

We deeply appreciate the continued interest and support of city and county officials and of our many donors and volunteers. Together, we are bringing the dream of completing the Stevens Creek Trail – from bay to mountains – closer to reality.

## *Following:*

- *Financial Statements for 2009*
- Trailblazer Newsletter Summer 2009