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Sonoma West Times & News February 28, 2002

Docents ...

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What's in it for the docents? Access to an incredibly rich and beautiful natural resource, says Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation volunteer Helen Shane.

Docents have the opportunity to learn firsthand about the Laguna's history and ecology and share the knowledge with visitors.

Students, environmentalists and landscape painters are among the Laguna explorers the docents have been escorting and enlightening on the Laguna's history and ecology.

"It's an incredible treasure. Not enough people know about it," said Shane. "We're trying to get the word out that the place is here and it needs

to be protected."

Docents will guide nature tours in the city of Sebastopol's wetlands park and four city of Santa Rosa Laguna parcels that last year became part of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District. The acquisition last week of an open space easement over John Balletto's Laguna agricultural property is also a major enhancement of Laguna restoration and preservation efforts.

Shane and Laguna Foundation volunteer Bob Evans recently showed a visitor around one of the open space parcels where wetlands habitat restoration and agricultural uses will coexist.

East of Llano Road much of Roseland Creek "is a ditch or a tunnel," said Evans. In contrast, Roseland Creek meanders through a now-designat-

ed "forever wild" area that provides habitat for mink and otter and where herons and hawks perch in native trees.

Evans, a former Hillcrest School principal and founder of the Petaluma Country Day School, said as more people see the beauty of the wetlands the Laguna Foundation is getting inquiries from interested people who want to hike or picnic. Free public access is not available yet, but that is the goal, said Evans.

"The vision is to be able to walk or ride a bike from the Russian River to Sonoma State," said Evans.

To sign up for the docent program call Evans at 823-0609 or Raini Vallarino at 829-5490.

You can also enroll simply by showing up next Monday at noon at the Santa Rosa Laguna Treatment Plant on Llano Road.

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by Frank Robertson