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JMLT fills final donation gap to keep Painted Rock wild

By *Sophie Braccini*



Painted Rock property with the end of Buckingham Drive on right. Photo Adam Weidenbach

A few days before the deadline for the John Muir Land Trust to deliver the \$2 million necessary to purchase the Painted Rock property, \$103,000 dollars were still missing - approximately the same amount the Moraga Town Council refused to contribute to the project. But recognizing that such an opportunity to preserve open space for future generations could not be missed, the JMLT board decided to use its reserve to fill the gap. Now Moraga and Lamorinda residents will have the privilege to gain access to over 500 acres of open recreational and stunningly beautiful space, from the very center of town.

JMLT Executive Director Linus Eukel explains that the reason why the board decided to contribute the missing funds to purchase the land of late Roger Poynts was the unprecedented number of people who contributed; the number of calls, emails, and donations coming in every day for the Campaign To Save Painted Rock was unlike anything the land trust has ever seen in three decades of conserving land. "Sometimes a very small amount of

money: \$5, \$20," he says. "But it showed that the people of the community really cared."

The number of people contributing and calling the trust to find out if the target was met was in fact a bit overwhelming to the staff of the trust, which is a lean nonprofit where resources go to land preservation, not to payroll. Eukel wanted to highlight the dedication of the JMLT staff and their outstanding work on behalf of the Painted Rock Campaign, including Krista Vossekuil, director of philanthropy; Melanie Hogan, director of major gifts; and Jay Dean, creative strategy director.

Eukel was of course sad to note that this campaign ended in a deficit for the JMLT; the campaign was arduous, expectations from public agencies were not met, but the director and his team are so proud to offer something that aligns so well with their mission. "The 96 acres of the Painted Rock property anchors a contiguous 505-acre of public open space atop these hills that will be a stunning new recreational resource for the community and a protected haven for wildlife," noted Eukel. He also wanted to say that nothing would have been possible without the desire of Roger Poynts' widow to forgo any development project and see her property conserved for the public's benefit.

This property is not the first that JMLT raised funds for in Lamorinda, there was Carr Ranch at the most western part of town, the Acalanes Ridge, the Batwing property for which the city of Lafayette had the vision to contribute \$1.8 million, and now Painted Rock. Eukel noted that this latest acquisition has similarities with the Acalanes Ridge as it makes the open space highly accessible, even more so with Painted Rock since the property line lies just across from the Rheem Shopping Center on the east side of Moraga Road.

In a press release published by the JMLT, one member of the JMLT board of directors Stephanie Becker said that as a longtime resident of Moraga, she could attest that the acquisition of Painted Rock creates a new park that will become a community treasure. She added that her husband, Damon, and herself believe it is vitally important for their children to grow up connected to nature, and Painted Rock will be a cherished legacy for all future generations.

The next steps include the close of escrow, moving forward with fire abatement, and dedication to open space in perpetuity. Eukel expects a public celebration in the fall, coming to the top of the property, socializing and celebrating. The \$2 million budget was for acquisition of the land, and so the trails and amenities will be another phase planned for sometime in the future. The director adds that there will be plenty of opportunities for community involvement to develop the potential of the open space. He expects that Painted Rock will welcome thousands of visitors of all ages and all abilities in the years to come and will become a trademark for Moraga, a real treasure for public health.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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