



File Photo

The inspiration behind founding the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy in 1988 was to preserve open space for future generations. Above, fourth-graders from Point Vicente Elementary School learn about the White Point Preserve before a hike in 2009.

25 years of preservation

By Mary Scott
Peninsula News

Standing along the rim of a coastal trail, unimpeded ocean breezes cool your face and fresh air fills your lungs. The open ground and open ocean offer a sense of freedom. It's you and the world.

There are 42 miles of coastal trails in the Palos Verdes Nature Preserve, offering unparalleled scenic beauty, clean air and a chance to commune with Mother Nature. Had it not been for the work of the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy these past 25 years, the ocean side of the Peninsula would have been a lot different.

"There would be open space," said Bill Ailor, founder of the land conservancy. "But nothing like what we have today."

Developers, he went on, wanted to shave the hilltop of the Forrestal property, now Forrestal Reserve, for a housing

community. Image a flattened peak with rows of houses.

"It would be substantially different than what we have today," he added.

The conservancy, which kicked off its yearlong 25th anniversary celebration in March, was incorporated in June 1988. Ailor, its founder, desired to protect land, like the Forrestal property, from overdevelopment and to preserve the open space for this generation and all the generations to come.

As a kid from the suburbs, Ailor had the opportunity to get outside and explore nature. "And to catch the occasional snake," he added. His wife, Barbara, grew up on a farm.

When the couple moved to the area in 1974 and saw Palos Verdes, they wanted those outdoor opportunities they were accustomed to for others.

Ailor became involved with his new

Conservancy

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hometown, becoming a member of the Rolling Hills Estates Planning Commission. As commissioner he heard firsthand the desires of developers.

Just like the residents who fought to incorporate the city of Rancho Palos Verdes for the same reason, Ailor wanted to take steps to prevent overdevelopment. He learned that cities had limited ways of preserving their own land.

"I thought the best way to preserve open space was to buy it," he said.

Ailor brought a representative from the Trust for Public Land, a national nonprofit that conserves land for people, to a local library. From this meeting, about 15 residents said they were sympathetic to his mission and wanted to help. He also approached residents who were well known in the community to give the burgeoning conservancy some credibility.

"That became the nucleus for the conservancy," he said.

Early on the newly formed group developed a set of properties that they wanted to acquire, such as property in Portuguese Bend and Shoreline Park in Rancho Palos Verdes and Chandler property in Rolling Hills Estates.

From the first donation of 20 acres in Lunada Canyon by Ken Zuckerman in 1992 to the last acquisition of 191 acres of Upper Filiorum property in 2009, the conservancy has now pieced together a

1,600-acre nature preserve — cherished and enjoyed by residents and nonresidents alike.

"Without strong community support, without support of our mission, we couldn't have done what we've done," said Andrea Vona, the conservancy's executive director.

It's been a collaborative effort among the conservancy, the cities of the Hill, especially the city of RPV, the community and an army of volunteers.

In the past 10 years, volunteers have logged in a total of 80,000 hours restoring habitat, repairing trails, guiding visitors on hikes throughout the preserve.

"People are still very much excited [about the conservancy's work]. In general, environmental awareness has elevated in recent years," Vona said.

While the preserve has improved the quality of life for community members, it has brought back to life endangered native species, like the PV blue butterfly — probably one of the world's rarest butterflies. By restoring its habitat, the blue butterfly can thrive once more.

Twenty-five years later, the mission continues: to preserve the land and restore the habitat. As the conservancy celebrates its past, it is looking into the future.

"So many milestones . . . so much more we want to accomplish," Vona said.

For more information about the conservancy's 25th anniversary, guided hikes, or Earth Day and monthly activities, visit www.pvplc.org.