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Friends of Orinda Creeks Gathers Steam

By Chris Lavin



Lisa Hales of Friends of Orinda Creeks and Chris Lavin check the trap. Photos provided

At a meeting last week of Friends of Orinda Creeks, seven people gathered to do two things: Revitalize their membership, and hear from the California Department of Fish and Game about how they can help children get more involved with trout. After all, notes member Brian Waters, a network of creeks is under just about everyone's nose.

"They see neighborhoods, roads, and they don't even know that a creek runs through it," Waters said.

Michael McGowan is out to change that. As the new person in charge of membership, he is determined to swell the ranks of Friends of Orinda Creeks to well beyond its paltry list today. The Friends are starting with their usual table at the Fourth of July celebration downtown, but McGowan also started a free membership group for any student who wants to join, no matter his or her age.

"It's something we just started, so it's not really going (gangbusters) yet," McGowan said. He plans to revamp the website to make it more appealing to students, make the site more user-friendly, and link it to educational materials.

That's where Ethan Rotman, who has the whopping title of Fishing in the City and Classroom Aquarium Education Programs Director for the state

of California, came in. Plus he has a picture of a mountain lion and a trout on his business card, something most people cannot get away with. Rotman described Trout in the Classroom, a program that needs sponsors to provide aquariums and support for teachers who want to hatch trout eggs, then have their students release them into pre-ordained areas where the trout are naturalized.

The Friends group immediately voted to sponsor three classrooms at about \$275 a pop. That pays for the aquarium, the water-cooling system, and posters that show what trout eat (just about anything that moves), where they live and what their habitat is dependent upon. "You have to remember that the high cost is up front, for the equipment," Rotman said. "Then it lasts for years. We haven't had anything break down yet." Teachers throughout the state, including in Orinda, participate in the program.

"It's quite the emotional experience for these kids," Rotman said. "They watch the fish hatch, and then they each get to go out with a tiny fish that can fit in a bottle cap and release it themselves." An added plus: The curriculum fits into the new core standards program in the middle grades.

"We have some schools that keep it going, year to year, adding more complexity," Rotman said. "It would be great if you could hook up with one of our volunteers and work with a classroom." All eight heads in the room nodded.

Rotman's visit seemed to add a new sense of urgency to the Friends' mission - to preserve the watershed, keep the creeks clean, and to increase membership.

"This guy is great," Waters said of Rotman's visit. "And I called him only yesterday."

Information about The Friends of Orinda Creeks can be found at www.orindacreeks.org.

Teachers wanting to participate in Trout in the Classroom can contact ethan.rotman@wildlife.ca.gov.



An overnight capture of wildlife in a tributary of San Pablo Creek in Orinda last week netted a frog, a crayfish and tons of stickleback fish.



Lisa Hales holds a frog for a photo opp before the frog was released.

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