

KEEPING COUNT OF VISITORS

Park It column by Ned MacKay

It's currently estimated that the East Bay Regional Parks receive 25 million visitors annually. This doesn't mean 25 million different people; it includes visitors who return frequently.

The figure is an amalgam of estimates from park supervisors, gate receipts from parks with entrance kiosks, and enrollment figures from programs and facilities requiring reservations. Knowing how many people visit the parks is important to district staff for park operation and maintenance.

In some areas the district has gone high tech in an effort to obtain a more accurate count. One example is in central Contra Costa County, where nine infrared counters have been set up on the regional trail network.

The counters are deployed along the Iron Horse, Contra Costa Canal, Lafayette/Moraga, California Hiking and Riding, and Briones to Mt. Diablo Regional Trails. Rangers download the accumulated information monthly. Counting passing traffic in 2013, they totaled 1.5 million visitor trips. It confirms the belief that the multi-use inter-park trails are among the district's most popular venues.

This is turning out to be one of the driest winters on record. As a result we are still experiencing a fire season that normally would have ended at least a month ago.

"These are definitely record-breaking unseasonal weather conditions," said Paul Cutino, the East Bay Regional Park District's assistant fire chief.

Paul said the district firefighters and rangers are on alert, and are completing extra patrols. Assuming the dry weather continues, he also had some fire safety tips for park visitors and neighbors:

- Be careful with matches and fire in general, especially when discarding cigarettes.
- Make campfires only in designated fire pits, and be sure they are properly extinguished. Be sure you have a permit when required. Abide by all posted or announced fire safety rules.
- Don't drive your vehicle into dry grass. A hot manifold can ignite a fire.
- Homeowners should be careful when mowing dry grass on their property. Hot motors and sparking from stones can start fires, too.
- If you see smoke in open parklands, report it immediately. Just call 9-1-1 and you will be connected to the proper agency.

Healthy Parks Healthy People Bay Area is a partnership of the Institute of the Golden Gate, East Bay Regional Park District, and Golden Gate National Recreation Area to promote the idea of regular outdoor recreation in the parks as a path to good health.

As part of this program, the regional park district offers monthly outdoor activities for people of all ages and abilities under the HPHP banner. Here are three of them, all on Saturday, Feb. 1:

- Celebrate the California state park system's 150th anniversary with an easy stroll along the shoreline at Crown Memorial State Beach to the Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary. It's from 10 to 11 a.m., led by naturalist Francis Mendoza. Meet at the intersection of Park Street and Shoreline Drive. For information, call 510-544-3187.
- For a Healthy Heart Hike, join naturalist Kristina Parkison for a stroll from 1 to 3 p.m. at Coyote Hills Regional Park in Fremont. This one is for ages 10 and older. Meet at the visitor center at the end of Patterson Ranch Road. For information, call 510-544-3220.
- Naturalist Cat Taylor will lead a two-mile backwoods ramble through the urban wilds of Shadow Cliffs Regional Recreation Area in Pleasanton from 9 to 11 a.m. Meet at the last parking lot near the Lake Trail. Shadow Cliffs is located on Stanley Boulevard just east of Valley Avenue.

Continuing the theme of something for all ages, the Family Fun Nature Hour at Crab Cove Visitor Center in Alameda will showcase sharks from 2 to 3 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, Feb. 1 and 2. Story Time and Nature Fun is from 11 to 11:30 a.m. every Saturday and Sunday in February.

Crab Cove is at 1252 McKay Ave. off Central Avenue in Alameda. For information, call 510-544-3187.

Hikes for Tykes is designed for young children accompanied by a parent. Naturalist Sara Fetterly will lead a one-mile tyke hike from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 4 at Lake Temescal in Oakland. Meet Sara at the south entrance off Broadway Terrace in Oakland.

For hikers ages 55 and older, there's the Over-The-Hills-Gang. Naturalist James Wilson will lead the gang on an exploration of Berkeley Meadow at East Shore State Park from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 4. Meet at the Seabreeze Market parking lot on University Avenue just west of the I-80 overcrossing in Berkeley.

And, how about Yoga for Kids? Youngsters six and older accompanied by a parent can try some kid-friendly, nature-themed yoga in a program from 2 to 3 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 2 at Tilden Nature Area in Berkeley, led by interpretive student aide Morgan Rani Evans.

Meet at the Environmental Education Center. To get there, park at the end of Lone Oak Road off Tilden's Central Park Drive, then follow the signs. For information, call 510-544-2233.

Fossils and frogs will be the quarry during a walk along and in Pine Creek at Diablo Foothills Regional Park in Walnut Creek, led by naturalist Eddie Willis. If it has been raining (we can only hope), the going may be a bit soggy at times.

Meet Eddie at 1 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 2 in the parking lot at the end of Castle Rock Road in Walnut Creek. The hike is for ages six and older. For information, call 888-327-2757, ext. 2750.

Fishing games are on the agenda in a program from 2 to 3 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 1 at Big Break Regional Shoreline in Oakley. Learn how to identify the different species that live in Delta waters.

Then from 10 to 11 a.m. on Sunday, Feb. 2, naturalist Kevin Damstra will talk about what a delta really is, and how ours is different from others.

Big Break is located on Big Break Road off Main Street in Oakley. For information, call 888-327-2757, ext. 3050.

All these programs are free and none require reservations. Some parking fees may apply. Find more information on all park district programs and make reservations online by visiting the park district website, www.ebparks.org.

Two Therapy Dogs Go to Doggie Heaven

Lawrence, the Livermore Lab, went to Doggie Heaven on December 21, 2013. And two weeks later, his buddy, Albert, went to Doggie Heaven to join Lawrence. Albert was grieving and stopped eating after Lawrence died. Both dogs were registered therapy dogs with Therapy Dogs Inc., headquartered in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

In March 2013, Lawrence's veterinarian found a mast cell tumor on his front right leg. It was surgically removed, followed by chemo. At his six-month follow-up with his oncologist, there was no sign of cancer in that area, but he was panting much of the time and sometimes coughing. So his oncologist x-rayed his lungs and found masses there. More tests showed masses in his liver too. Four weeks later, the masses were growing, despite weekly chemo treatments. So we tried another chemo every two-four weeks with plans after five sessions to reassess him. We never reached that point. The oncologist diagnosed Lawrence as probably having a cancer in the lining of his blood vessels (hemangiosarcoma), so it spread throughout his body, from the liver to the lungs and beyond. The chemo was tough on him. But he continued to wag his tail to his right and accept treats, even on his final day, just before his veterinarian, Dr. Heather Moore, sent him on his final journey to Doggie Heaven on the evening of December 21.

Albert was diagnosed with small cell (T cell) lymphoma in his intestinal tract in early December 2013. He also had chronic gastroenteritis with GI ulceration. We did not do chemo with Albert. The day before Albert died, we tried acupuncture and herbal treatment. I had hoped he would overcome the loss of Lawrence, but that was not to be. On the morning of January 4, 2014, I found Albert suffering on the family room floor, under the ceiling fan, one of Lawrence's favorite resting spots. Dr. Moore came over in a couple hours to send Albert on his way to reuniting with Lawrence.

Lawrence was born on July 20, 2001, in Palo Alto. His father Nitro was born at Marstad Labradors on Tesla Road in Livermore, giving Lawrence his Livermore connection. Pat Wheeler obtained Lawrence from Elemental Labs in Palo Alto. He is an AKC registered Black Lab. When Pat went to see the Black Lab puppies, there were eight adorable puppies, all Black (though the mother was a yellow Lab), four females and four males. Pat could not decide which puppy to get. She told the breeder she wanted her dog to be a therapy dog, so he recommended the one that first interacted with people. He turned out to be a wonderful choice. He was named Lawrence, the Livermore Lab. He was one of five dogs to win the Tri-Valley Herald "Name That Cutie" contest in November 2011.

Pat took Lawrence to puppy socialization classes and to basic obedience classes. Those didn't keep him from chewing up the couch in the family room or the cargo cover in her car. But Pat could see that Lawrence was born to be a therapy dog. One event was particularly poignant. Pat often walked Lawrence around shopping areas. One day, she wanted to head back to the car, but Lawrence had other ideas and had a strong way of making his point known. He "tugged" Pat toward a disheveled drunk man sitting by a trash can outside a liquor store. Lawrence went right up to him, comforted him, and put a smile of his face. Lawrence obviously knew how to do his job!

In November 2002, Lawrence became registered as a therapy dog with Valley Humane Society. The next month, on December 12, 2002, he started work at Golden Manor, a facility in Livermore for people with Alzheimer's and dementia. He loved going there almost every Friday morning and did so for years, under different owners, until it closed in November 2011. Pat was always amazed, as were staff there, to see how Lawrence could get people



Pictured with Pat Wheeler are Lawrence (left) and Albert.

to open up, talk, participate, do what staff asked them to do, and bring joy to visitors as well as those residing there.

In July 2004, he started going to the VA in Livermore, until Pat and he were terminated from the therapy dog program there in July 2013. Lawrence accumulated 1,398 hours of service to our veterans. He served them in several areas including short-term care, long-term care, respite care, Alzheimer's unit, clinical social work group therapy sessions, physical therapy, recreational therapy, memorial services, and Protestant services. It was the day that Lawrence managed to get a patient to walk out of his room on his own that Pat became aware of what a wonderful difference Lawrence could make. No staff had been able to do that, but Lawrence got this person to walk out of his room on his own. Staff were stunned when they saw Lawrence walking with this man. That was the start of Pat collecting many stories and testimonials, first at the VA and then at numerous other sites and programs which lead to the book, *Successful Tails: The Wonders of Therapy Dogs* (available on-line, Amazon and Barnes & Noble as well as at Cooleykatz Toys in Livermore and Towne Center Books in Pleasanton).

In June 2005, the VA did not have staff available to take veterans to participate in the Rodeo Parade. So the Residents Council asked if Lawrence would represent them. Of course he was delighted to do so. But then the local radio station, KKKI, contacted Pat to find out which branch of the service he was in and what his rank was. Pat had no idea how to respond. So she went to the VA. In the lobby of the nursing home were two veterans in their wheelchairs, a very large Marine and a very slender Navy veteran. She posed the question to them, with Lawrence by her side. The Marine loudly exclaimed, "Oh, he's a Master Sergeant in the Marines." The Navy veteran quietly said, "Oh no, he's the Chief Petting Officer." That was the start of the therapy dogs at the VA being "Navy Petting Officers."

Lawrence had just over 100 hours at that time, so 100 hours became the level for a dog to be a Chief Petting Officer. A group of four Navy veterans met and assigned Navy ranks for various hour award levels. When Lawrence reached 1,000 hours in 2010, the Navy veterans at the VA promoted him to "Rear Admiral" for 1,000 hours of tail wagging. In 2006, Lawrence and Pat started to work with recreation therapy staff to coordinate the therapy dog group at the VA. Lawrence was involved in the training and testing of many therapy dog teams over the next four years.

In September 2006, Lawrence visited the mother of Pat's friend at an Easy Living Care Home (ELCH) site in Livermore and that started many years of visits at ELCH facilities. A resident at one of the homes that he visited in November 2013, said to Lawrence, "Lawrence, when you die, I know you'll go to Doggie Heaven. When I die, I hope I can go to Doggie Heaven so we can meet again. But if they won't let me in, I'll send you my forwarding address."

Lawrence was invited to make presentations about the work of dogs. He did this at elementary schools in San Ramon and Sunol and twice for the graduate ecotherapy program at JFK

University in Pleasant Hill. Lawrence impressed people with his ability to read and follow commands and his multiple approaches to getting people over their fear of dogs.

In April 2010, Lawrence was invited by the Pleasanton Military Families to attend a Welcome Home Celebration for a troop member. He went to many more welcome homes, scores of them from Oakland to Oakley to Livermore and Pleasanton until November 2013. We established a Petting Officer Pack under the Diablo Valley Flag Brigade for therapy dogs to formally attend the welcome homes in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. Lawrence and his fellow pack members not only went to welcome homes, but marched in parades, attended military ceremonies, etc. His last welcome home was in Blackhawk for a Navy Captain whose father is a Rear Admiral. How appropriate.

Albert found Pat one Friday evening in August 2002. She was doing some errands in town and on her way home saw a black medium-size dog running around on Enos Way, near St. Bartholomew's Church. At first Pat thought it was her Black Lab, Lawrence. So she pulled over and opened the back of her car. This strange dog dashed over, jumped into the car, and started licking Pat's face. Pat checked at three or four houses in the area and no one seemed to know whose dog this was. All he had on was a rabies tag, so Pat took him home and called Animal Control and the veterinarian's office where he got his rabies shot. As soon as he walked into Pat's house, he and Lawrence were best of buddies. They walked around the family room together as if they had Velcro between them. We think Albert was a Border Collie/Black Lab mix, born in the spring of 2001.

Animal Control had no one available to pick him up until Monday and asked if she could keep him until then. She agreed to do so. When the veterinarian's office called the next day, she found out who his temporary owners were. They were out of town and the pet sitter lost track of all their pets. They arrived back the next evening. They called Pat and told her that they had been given this dog by a homeless family near Eureka and were hoping to find a home for him. They didn't need to do that; he had found a home for himself. Pat named him Albert after Albert Einstein, but later changed that to Albert Schweitzer when a veteran at the VA pointed out that "he was not only smart, but also healing."

After completing some basic obedience classes, Albert became registered as a therapy dog with Valley Humane Society in spring of 2005. He began working as a therapy dog at the VA in May 2005. He worked in the nursing home, short-term care unit, physical therapy, and Alzheimer's unit. By the time he was terminated by Valley Humane Society in July 2013, he had accumulated 1,002 hours of service to veterans at the VA facility in Livermore.

In February 2006, Albert was welcomed as the first therapy dog ever at Shepherd's Gate in Livermore, a safe haven for battered and homeless women and their children. At the end of his first year there, Albert earned the "Volunteer of the Year" award. He did a wonderful job of providing unconditional love to the children and their mothers,

playing with them and going for walks with them, helping them overcome their fear of dogs, and learning good manners.

In July 2006, Albert started going to Golden Manor and, in September 2006, to Easy Living Care Home sites and to Golden Manor. Both Lawrence and Albert participated in parades (e.g., Livermore Rodeo Parade, Veterans Day Parade), and attended Welcome Home Celebrations and other military events. Lawrence also performed Arthur Pryor's "The Whistler and His Dog" with bands in Carmichael (near Sacramento), Livermore, San Francisco, San Ramon, and Union City. After being terminated by Valley Humane Society and no longer able to go to the VA in Livermore, they went to the Amador Tri-Valley Center, the Castro Valley Healthcare Center (Life House), and the Livermore Valley Senior Living. Lawrence also visited the Parkview in Pleasanton.

Both Lawrence and Albert were AKC Canine Good Citizens, Canine Partners, and registered therapy dogs with Therapy Dogs Inc. In 2012, Lawrence was one of six therapy dogs in the United States honored by the AKC Humane Fund for Canine Excellence. In 2011, both received a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition from U.S. Congressman Jerry McNerney and a Certificate of Appreciation from then Vice Mayor John Marchand. Their favorite command was WORK. They wouldn't wake from a sound sleep to the words "treat" or "walk," but jumped up instantly at the word "work." And whenever Pat got their therapy dog vests out of the drawer, both were anxious to go to "work," sometimes with both trying to put their heads into the vest. They will be sorely missed by the hundreds of people they have served over the years. Hopefully, they have left these people with many happy memories.

In July 2013, Pat Wheeler obtained a ten-month-old, female Black Lab from Marstad Labradors. Named Maddie, she became a registered therapy dog with Therapy Dogs Inc., in October 2013 and is picking up the many jobs that Lawrence and Albert were doing. Fortunately, she loves being a therapy dog—the best job in the world!

For further information, go to www.phwheeler.com.

For more on Lawrence, go to these two sites—

<http://albums.phanfare.com/isolated/tourCRTU/1/5355494>

<http://diablovalleyflagbrigade.com/goodbye-lawrence/>

For more on Albert, go to <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.502185273192562.1073741850.110516249026135&type=1>

Donations in Lawrence's and Albert's memories may be made to—

• Amador Tri-Valley Center, attn: Stephanie Russell, 2177 Las Positas Lane, Suite B/C, Livermore, CA 94551 (make check payable to ANKA BHI and write "for Amador Tri-Valley Center" on the memo line) www.ankaprograms.wordpress.com/atvc/

ATVC is a day program for people with developmental/mental disabilities and who are at risk of involvement with the criminal justice system; Albert and Lawrence started there in 2013.

• Diablo Valley Flag Brigade, 1161 Scots Lane, Walnut Creek, CA 94596 www.diablovalleyflagbrigade.com

Starting in 2010, Lawrence and Albert attended welcome homes throughout much of Alameda and Contra Costa counties and other events with the DVFB.

• Pleasanton Military Families, 4411 Shearwater Court, Pleasanton, CA 94566. www.pleasantonmilitaryfamilies.org/

Lawrence started attending welcome homes for PMF troop members in April 2010 and Albert followed. Lawrence marched in the Veterans Day parade with the PMF.

• Shepherd's Gate, 1660 Portola Avenue, Livermore, CA 94551. <https://secure.common-ground.convio.com/shepgate/generaldonations/>

Shepherd's Gate is a safe haven for battered and homeless women and children where Albert volunteered starting in February 2006.

• Therapy Dogs Inc., P.O. Box 20227, Cheyenne, WY 82003

www.therapydogs.com

This is the association with which Lawrence and Albert were registered therapy dogs and which has thousands of therapy dog teams throughout the US and Canada.