

Conservancy Celebrating Its 15th Anniversary

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The Tri-Valley Conservancy (TVC) is celebrating its first 15 years of operation. Its goals are to protect and save agricultural and open space land in the Tri-Valley area.

What started out as the South Livermore Valley Agricultural Land Trust has grown to become the Conservancy that now encompasses Livermore, Dublin, Pleasanton and San Ramon.

Started in September 1994 as the South Livermore Valley Agricultural Land Trust, with only a handful of members and just as many directors, the land trust at that time was set up to protect 5,000 acres of land within South Livermore.

Executive Director Sharon Burnham said that 4159 acres are currently under easement. Of that total, 3643 acres are in agriculture and 576 acres in open space.

Today, 15 years later, the vision has blossomed to move beyond its first goal of preserving land in South Livermore. Now the Conservancy has in its sights acquiring property that will link two local East Bay Regional Park District parks, Shadow Cliffs in Pleasanton to Del Valle Regional Park in Livermore. Another future, long-term goal is to link the Bay Trail and the Pleasanton Ridge.

Asked how the current economic downturn is impacting the Conservancy, Burnham said there is no money available from the state. Unlike homes, raw land has not decreased in value.

Burnham noted that state funds that would be used to purchase land near Del Valle could be available soon, since the state is now issuing bonds again.

Land that would be placed under easement and monitored by the Conservancy in Pleasanton is awaiting final legal rulings. The 496 acres of open space are part of the Oak Grove development in the southeast hills of Pleasanton.

The Conservancy is also looking to gain accreditation from Washington, D.C.-based Land Trust Alliance. Burnham said, "Accreditation is a very big deal. It shows that a land trust is following the correct procedures, adhering to the IRS rules." She said that down the road accreditation could help the Conservancy obtain money.

The Conservancy is in the process of finalizing the North Livermore Conservation Preservation Study, then will start looking at priorities for protection within the area. "We would start talking to landowners about easements. It's okay for the land to remain in private hands," she added.

While the Conservancy has its board members, executive director and dedicated staff members, it's also dependent on the many volunteers, the landowners, grape growers, winery owners and farmers who believe in preserving and protecting the legacy of the Tri-Valley land.

There are ten board members. Livermore, Pleasanton, Alameda County, Friends of the Vineyards, and the Winegrowers Association each appoint one board member. The remaining five are voted on by the seated directors.

Volunteers assist in many areas including the office, with the Quest education program, and the annual Jeans and Jewels fund-raising. They also help with stewardship by going out and walking the land to ensure that property owners are living up to the conditions of easements.

For more information about the Tri-Valley Conservancy, call Burnham, at 925-449-8709.