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JMLT campaign underway to save Harvey Ranch

By Vera Kochan



One of the many hiking trails within Harvey Ranch Photos provided

Anyone who takes a hike along the trails within Harvey Ranch is met with breathtaking views of Moraga and beyond. Hoping to preserve a 143-acre section of the ranch and create a 15,500-acre natural area by connecting the three protected landscapes of Las Trampas Regional Wilderness, San Leandro Watershed and Painted Rock Preserve (which includes Carr Ranch, Buckhorn Creek, and Rocky Ridge), the John Muir Land Trust has been tasked by property owner Charlene Harvey to help her fulfill a dream to preserve the location against development.

Harvey's husband, Jim, first bought the nearly 200-acre property and lived there in a small cabin before they met and married over 60 years ago. After their marriage they lived in San Francisco, but kept adding on to the structure at the ranch for their weekend getaways and eventual build-up of cattle.

"Jim always saw the ranch as a buffer between the very developed Bluffs and the very rural nature of Bollinger Canyon," said Harvey. "We always talked about how to do that and protect it, but he didn't really take that step in his lifetime."

After her husband passed away, Harvey continued to visit the ranch on weekends and in summers with her three generations of family, but none of them had plans to make it their primary residence, "so I began to think about how I could protect it from development."

Harvey decided on the 143-acre figure because she has a grandson who lives in one of the houses on the property and who helps manage the ranch, and she felt it important to have a buffer of land surrounding the houses and barn while making the rest available to the public.

With her decision to get the ball rolling, Harvey contacted JMLT through recommendations. "Everyone I asked had great things to say about them - how easy it was to work with them, and when I met Linus I felt I would have a real partner."

No stranger to launching land preservation campaigns, JMLT Executive Director Linus Eukel was happy to take up the mantle and fulfill Harvey's vision. The Save Harvey Ranch Campaign is hoping to raise \$4 million by the Dec. 31, 2022 deadline. COVID mandates have thrown a wrench into the efforts, but have not deterred the full speed ahead mindset to make the Harvey family's dream a reality.

"The \$4 million goal covers our cost of acquiring Harvey Ranch," explained Eukel. "No two projects are the same. These costs include appraisals, surveys, natural resource assessment reports, title research, legal fees, staff time, and the actual purchase price for transferring title. It adds up quickly!"

What's at stake is the loss of 143 untouched acres of land; a gateway to over 15,000 acres of pristine wilderness; a new staging area with trailheads, and trail connections; convenient access to the entire Easy Bay; quick access to amazing views and pathways; an enhanced buffer for wildlife; a protected viewshed; and the preservation of land surrounding Saint Mary's College.

The Harvey Ranch will provide magnificent hiking trails to nature lovers of any age and ability. From short walks to miles of trails with varying terrain, there is something to see and enjoy for everybody. Equestrians will even be allowed access to centuries-old ranch roads.

The ranch itself is a habitat for countless animals, reptiles and raptors. Making the area their domicile are gray foxes, deer, opossums, raccoons, jackrabbits, weasels, bobcats, mountain lions, Northern alligator lizards, gopher snakes, Western pond turtles, red-tailed and Cooper's hawks, golden eagles, great blue herons and great egrets, to name a few. Threatened and endangered species such as the Alameda whipsnake and the California red-legged frog also call Harvey Ranch home.

When asked what will happen to the 143 acres of Harvey Ranch if the \$4 million figure falls short, Eukel replied, "If we fall short, we will not be able to purchase any portion of the property. The residents of Lamorinda were extremely generous when JMLT raised funds for the successful acquisitions of Carr Ranch and Painted Rock. This community understands the value and importance of our conserved spaces. We are optimistic."

According to the JMLT campaign, "A few minutes spent in daily traffic on the once-rural roads of Lamorinda make it clear that the area is booming. Population pressure grows as each new home is built and new traffic light is installed. Protecting Harvey Ranch is a rare opportunity to save a landscape that is universally recognized as a critical conservation milestone - a gem to be spared from bulldozer, concrete and asphalt."

"I just know how pleased Jim would be about this decision," stated Harvey. "He really was a true environmentalist, and to be able to protect this little part of the county and make it a gateway to the larger trail system would be exactly what he would have wanted. The family is also very pleased about this decision.

"The land trust has been great to work with," added Harvey. "As has Saint Mary's College, who has been a good neighbor for 50 years. I think this will be a win-win for everyone."

JMLT will host a virtual kickoff event on Feb. 3, along with public hikes in the spring and summer. To sign up for an e-newsletter or for more information visit: jmlt.org or call (925) 228-5018. To make a donation to the Save Harvey Ranch Campaign contact JMLT Director of Development Melanie Hogan: melanie@jmlt.org.



Photos provided

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