

## Toris Jaeger: A Natural Asset

Submitted by Jane Wisner



Toris Jaeger, Naturalist at the Wagner Ranch Nature Area Photo provided

Thirty years ago, Warren and Maile Arnold made a wise decision. As the Directors of the Wagner Ranch Nature Area (WRNA), they hired a naturalist—Toris Jaeger—for Orinda's first outdoor education program. Jaeger has been in the Orinda Union School District (OUSD) ever since sharing her love of nature with the students and adults in the community.

Before coming to Wagner Ranch, Jaeger recalls that she was a schoolteacher who spent "more time looking out the windows than the students did." With the support of the Educational Foundation of Orinda (EFO) and other community members, she developed a natural science and living history curriculum and set forth teaching in her outdoor classroom. Now, after 30 years in the District, Jaeger occasionally finds herself teaching the children of her earlier students. "Being a part of Wagner Ranch Nature Area for 30 years has been a journey, a gift, and a trial by fire and ice," states Jaeger.

"The Nature Area offers and holds a history of the natural world for all to learn from and enjoy," she adds.

Jaeger hopes that the future of the Wagner Ranch Nature Area as an environmentally protected area will be secure with the help of the Friends of the WRNA working together with other community groups. "[I hope that] the WRNA will continue to provide a place for each child, parent, teacher and the community to experience nature at its finest." The EFO has fully funded the environmental education program from kindergarten through 8th grade in the OUSD for several years and will be providing over \$66,000 for environmental education in the 2008-2009 school year.