

Chapter Chair Chat

Volunteering to Make a Difference and Feel Good!

By Carole Mintzer, Santa Lucia Chapter Chair



I've been a volunteer with the Sierra Club for over 20 years, and over that time I've engaged with many other dedicated volunteers who commit time and money to protecting and preserving our environment through this organization. I've been thinking lately about what drives this commitment and how we can encourage others to take the plunge and make the Sierra Club their volunteer home.

For me, the motivation to volunteer initially came after I moved to conservative Orange County and wanted to meet people who shared an interest in the environment and held the same progressive values I have. I started attending a few meetings and soon enough, I was hooked. I followed a progression that started with participating on a task force to stop an outsized development in east Orange and supporting the Political Committee (I supplied cookies to many a meeting!). In just a few years, I became the Chair of the Orange County Conservation Committee and later the OC Political Committee. A few years after that, I was elected to the Angeles Chapter Executive Committee and served as Chair for three years.

Along the way, I made friends, gained new knowledge (yeah, when I started, I had no idea what CEQA was – the California Environmental Quality Act), and learned new skills (like how to run a meeting and communicate effectively). OK, some of these things remain a work in progress, but the idea is to never stop learning and trying to improve.

To write this article, I did a search on the “benefits of volunteering” and found confirmation of what I have gained as a Sierra Club volunteer:

- Connect with people; make friends
- Have a purpose and make a difference
- Learn new skills and gain knowledge about your community
- Contribute to the community
- Boost self-esteem
- Improve physical and mental health
- Feel good!

And now that I'm retired, it's also a great way to fill the time that I used to spend in the workforce. For those who aren't retired, volunteering and learning new skills looks great on your resume.

Since Alex and I moved to Los Osos in April 2020, the benefits of volunteering with the Sierra Club have been all the more important by helping to reduce the isolation of the pandemic. It has helped us make new friends, learn about our community, and get engaged even while staying at home. I have learned new skills, which they say is good for the brain – I can use Zoom, Salesforce, Marketing Cloud, NetSuite, and Van! – none of which I could do a year ago.

With all these benefits, I hope you're wondering what sort of volunteer opportunities the Sierra Club has and how you can get involved. Here are just a few of the possibilities at the Santa Lucia Chapter:

- Serve on a Chapter committee and become part of a team – Conservation Committee, Political Committee, Outings, Fundraising, Communications, Environmental and Social Justice, to name a few.
- Serve on the Chapter Executive Committee – see the flyer in this newsletter
- Get involved with a specific issue – 30 by 30, designation of the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary, Oceano Dunes, reducing plastic waste, decommissioning Diablo Canyon, etc.
- Write/edit articles for the Santa Lucian – our newsletter
- Lead outings – help people get outdoors
- When we can get back to in-person gatherings, help with outreach about the Sierra Club at events
- Serve as the Chapter Treasurer – our current Treasurer is ready to train his replacement so he can retire – see the flyer in this newsletter.

If you're thinking this sounds interesting but you don't have the expertise, trust me, we'll help you with that. Remember, I didn't know what CEQA was 20 years ago – I had a lot to learn! Bring your passion and we will help guide you with the specific knowledge needed to become an effective volunteer.

How to get started? Go online and fill out our [volunteer questionnaire](#):

There also are opportunities to volunteer at the state and national levels of Sierra Club. Here's how you can find out about those.

Sierra Club California is the legislative and regulatory arm for Sierra Club chapters in California. Learn more about what they do, the issue committees they have, and how to volunteer with them at sierraclub.org/California

Sierra Club chapters throughout the country post volunteer positions at Volunteer Connection – some positions can be done remotely, others need to be in-person.
<https://clubvolunteer.org/>

If you want to get involved in protecting voting rights and encouraging people to register to vote and vote, check out the options at:
<https://www.mobilize.us/sierraclubbattleground/>

Join us, get involved, make a difference, and feel good!

Until next time, stay safe, get outdoors, and advocate for a clean environment and the protection of nature here on the Central Coast.

Carole