

Walter Fuller Receives Outstanding Senior Community Recognition Award

by Steve Nash

Walter Fuller, the recipient of the Community Recognition Award, 2014 Outstanding Senior, presented by the City of Oxnard's Community Relations Commission, sat down and chatted about what led him to his current pastime as steward and docent of Ormond Beach, Oxnard's beautiful stretch of California coastline running from the Hueneme Pier to the western boundary of Pt. Mugu, NBVC.

Walter was born in 1954 in Chandler, Arizona, near the Williams Air Force Base. He and his mother moved to Ojai, California to live with his grandparents in 1964. Walter's grandfather worked for the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, where he was involved in many of our local water infrastructure projects. His grandmother was a schoolteacher from Minnesota and she made sure Walter completed his homework. No play until the chores, schoolwork and pets were taken care of properly!

Walter loved baseball and often walked to Sarzotti Park to play the game. As Walter began hiking the local mountains, his love of baseball began to turn to a deep love of nature and wildlife. Walter hiked often in the Los Padres Forest. He felt right at home among the deer and bear. He acquired a menagerie that included pythons, constrictors, local snakes, raccoons, and foxes that he would parade through his grandparent's house, never hearing them complain about their furry and scaled guests. He also had many birds, among them parakeets, cockatiels, cockatoos, an Amazon parrot and an injured Red-tailed hawk he rehabbed and then gave to a more appropriate facility. He still holds a special place in his heart for Whitey, the parakeet that led Walter to learn more about birds of all types. Walter now says that wild animals should stay free and not be kept as pets. He discourages people from interacting with the wildlife at Ormond Beach.

Mr. Fuller attended Nordhoff High School where his Senior-year science teacher encouraged him to do a report on the Golden Eagle. This is when Walter learned how to use the Audubon Field Guide and binoculars. He said his first camera was a Kodak 126 box camera. Walter was a member of Boy Scout Troop No. 512. He would also go to church camp at Lake Cachuma. It was during one of these visits when he encountered and then adopted a semi-wild tabby he named Snowball. Walter now wonders why he chose that particular name, as Snowball had not a single patch of white. Walter remembers Snowball as being all claws when he first got him. Walter recalls Ojai as a place where he was close to his grandparents, mother and the many animals under his care.

Walter remembers a trip he took to the Ventura Harbor in 1971. He found an injured brown pelican so, of course, he grabbed it and took it on the SCAT bus back to Ojai where he could properly care for it. The bus driver looked at him funny but Walter assured him that he would hold on to the injured bird. The bus driver said, "You'd better!" Walter says he was taught to be respectful and caring towards humans and animals.

Mr. Fuller has a son and a daughter with his wife, who passed in 1986.

Walter worked at Pt. Mugu, NBVC until 1996 when he was caught in the initial BRAC process and released. He was already familiar with the Ormond Beach area and had been photographing its many splendors. Roma Armbrust had heard of his photos and sought Walter out to borrow some of his images for her efforts to preserve Ormond Beach. This was in 1995. Walter began spending more and more of his time at Ormond Beach, first at the Perkins Road site and eventually turning his full attention to the Arnold Road area.

Walter lost his mother in 1999 after sharing a very close relationship with her. She was his hiking partner, inspiration and closest confidante. Walter says he would like to dedicate his contributions to Ormond to her memory. From that point on, Walter immersed himself in caring for Ormond Beach, her wetlands and wildlife. He has been serving as Ormond's steward and docent ever since, uncompensated but greatly loved and appreciated by everyone who visits the area.

These are some of the animals Walter has encountered at Ormond: long-tailed weasels, coyotes, foxes, rattlesnakes, gopher snakes, ospreys, peregrine falcons, great blue herons, snowy egrets, least terns, sea lions, dolphins, whales, bald and golden eagles, burrowing owls and 250 documented bird species. A reason for the great diversity in bird species is Ormond Beach lying along the Pacific flyway for migratory birds.

The City of Oxnard and her residents very graciously provided Mr. Fuller with a trailer and electric hook-up this year thanks to the City Council approving Measure O expenditures. Prior to receiving his trailer, Walter was operating out of a metal shipping container, with no water and no electricity.

So please remember, when you visit the Arnold Road site, to give Mr. Fuller a little something. Walter is an unpaid volunteer. This is a partial list of some of his activities on behalf of the Ormond Beach area: currently assisting NBVC in a volunteer capacity, supplying 17 years of bird research and data analysis as part of the Navy's drone project with an emphasis on bird strikes; currently the senior docent of Ventura County Shorebirds in charge of volunteer teaching efforts; volunteer director for the erection of protective fencing for endangered shorebirds at Ormond Beach; volunteer director for education, RESTOR Project, Ventura Community College, CSUCI; volunteer director of education seminars conducted

for Cal Poly Pomona; assists in quarterly bird reports for the Ormond Beach Task Force; volunteer for the Fish and Wildlife Service; volunteer for Fish and Game; volunteer assistant for Nature Conservancy and Coastal Conservancy land managers; volunteer with the Laboratory of Ornithology of the American Bird Conservancy, North American Birds, Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network; volunteer assistant for NBVC, Arnold Road security fencing project. His presence has nearly eliminated vehicle break-ins and vandalism. This makes it possible for all of us to enjoy a carefree trip to this wonderful diamond-in-the-rough we call Ormond.

Steve Nash, 9-19-14