

VOLUNTEER OF THE MONTH

Jean Whitridge

Jane Reichhold: How did you come to live here on the coast?

Jean Whitridge: My husband and I and our three children had rented houses at The Sea Ranch twice a year starting in 1979. All three children learned to drive on The Sea Ranch roads. I was not their instructor! We built our house on Seal Rock Reach in 1991, and were preparing to retire and become "full timers" in 1997. In June of that year, John aged 59, died suddenly and unexpectedly. Six months later, against the advice and urgent pleas of my friends in Napa, where we had lived for 28 years, I moved into The Sea Ranch house with my Springer Spaniel – Dickens – knowing no one. Now almost ten years later, and with another Springer – Jo Jo – it has proved to be one of the best decisions I ever made. I don't need to tell anyone about the beauty and magic of this special North Coast. The true joys of living here are the people in both The Sea Ranch Community and Gualala. They are open, warm, caring, and always interesting.



JR: How did you first experience Gualala Arts?

JW: We discovered Art in the Redwoods in 1991 up on the Ridge and when part of it was in Bower Park. I began entering watercolors and some photography the next year and have not missed sending in an entry each year since.

JR: What is your favorite volunteer job?

JW: Perhaps my favorite is being the "cookie lady" for The Trails Committee's annual Circumambulation. It is always fun to be popular even when it's really the cookies getting the praise. Volunteering at the Dolphin is fun, because the Tourist Information Center is there so we get to meet people from all over the world and help them enjoy our bit of paradise. Every Thursday afternoon I tutor at The Village Tutors. This is my third year with Juan, a third grader at Horicon School. His big smile and hug at the beginning and end of our session is the highlight of my week, and besides I am seeing his great progress. Being a docent on opening night of Art in The Redwoods is not usually my favorite job, but it was this year. I was docent in the gallery and got to sell both of my own watercolors. The first woman was treated (?) to a big surprise hug! Probably my favorite volunteer job is preparing for Art in the Redwoods. I love checking in art on take-in day, and then helping Lee Kosso apply all the labels to the art and

finally (believe it or not) I love dusting and straightening every piece. And no, I will not come to your house and dust!

JR: Sorry to hear that! You would have gotten requests. The Art in the Redwoods exhibit always looks great! So, what does Gualala Arts bring to your life?

JW: I see Gualala Arts as, not only an arts center where we can enjoy and participate in an amazing array of art forms, but as a community center that brings us all together, Gualalans and Sea Ranchers alike for a common cause.

JR: We have been trying to add up the number of hours donated to Gualala Arts by volunteers. How many hours a year would you estimate that you give in volunteer work?

JW: I figure I volunteer around 350 hours a year. When you consider there are 5,840 waking hours in a year, I have plenty of time for tennis, hiking, reading, watercolor, photography, birding, gardening, cooking, and enjoying friends and walking Jo Jo.

JR: Do you have any suggestions for how we can make the volunteer program better?

JW: I feel Gualala Arts has a fine volunteer program. Volunteers are trained well, treated with respect, and very much appreciated.

JR: What are your reasons for volunteering, in general, or to Gualala Arts?

JW: I was raised by a mother who had been an early Girl Scout and she continued her involvement well into adulthood. I, too, became a Brownie Girl Scout, went all the way through, volunteered as a leader in college and then as just about everything as an adult, culminating in Council President for six years. I am a lifetime member. In Girl Scouting volunteering is a way of life that was instilled in me early. I have found you always get back more than you give.

JR: Thank you Jean, for letting us become better acquainted with you through your answers. A huge thanks for all your volunteer work comes from everyone here at Gualala Arts.