

## SDWF member reinvents backyard environment

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When Lynn Owens joined the San Diego Women's Foundation in 2004, little did she know the extent to which it would change her life.

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In 2003, Owens retired from a successful career in the software industry and wanted to become involved in the community. With more than 9,000 nonprofit organizations in San Diego, it was not easy for Owens to figure out where to focus her time and money.

Then Owens attended the San Diego Women's Foundation annual grants celebration at which grants totaling \$225,000 were awarded to five nonprofit organizations in San Diego.

Impressed by the impact, Owens decided to become a member of this group which now members about 220 women from all parts of San Diego County. Each member contributes \$2,000 a year. Part of this money is given away each year, part goes into an endowment, and a small percentage funds operations.

"I realized that I would have a greater impact on the community by pooling my money with others, and I could learn more about specific organizations and ensure that my gift really had an impact," Owens said.

SDWF members are encouraged to become involved, and Owens led the granting process which is called "Discovery." Each year, the foundation rotates its area of focus and makes a decision based on an investigation of community priorities. This year, the group selected the environment as the focus. Then it had discussions with more than 80 community leaders and 54 experts in the San Diego environmental community.



"Nearly all of the experts we met had one simple message to the San Diego Women's Foundation team: unless we as individuals connect to our local natural environments, we have little motivation to sustain our natural resources," Owens said. "Like other San Diegans, I've taken for granted San Diego's unique environment and trifecta of desert, mountains and beaches."

After listening to the experts, Owens immediately took personal responsibility for her part in improving the environment in San Diego. First, she began using public transportation. Traveling from her home in Scripps Ranch to attend meetings across San Diego, Owens has become adept at using Google maps to

navigate optimal bus and trolley routes. A side benefit has been making new friends and learning about her fellow passengers' interests, aspirations and cultures.

Second, Owens and her husband Russ improved the environment in their home and backyard. They began to use water and energy more creatively. For example, they now heat their kitchen dishwashing water using natural sunlight on their patio instead of the water heater at the far end of the house. In addition, Russ builds dams to redirect excess irrigation water from a neighbor's yard so they can use it to water their own front yard. They also brought the beach to their backyard by replacing their thirsty grass backyard with a sandy beach.

After changing her lifestyle, Owens decided to take her new inspiration and knowledge to the Scripps Ranch community. She contacted the Scripps Ranch Civic Association in order to let her neighbors know what they could do to help the environment.

Now the Sustainable Scripps Ranch committee of the SRCA helps to connect the community through newsletter articles, educational events including a low-water landscaping workshops, and family events such as a community fair booth where children designed their own mini-gardens.

A Family Adventures in Nature Club (FAN club) is starting in mid-October, and additional field trips and speakers are planned throughout the fall and winter.

"The mission of the San Diego Women's Foundation is to educate and inspire women to engage in significant and sustainable philanthropy to strengthen the San Diego region," said Cindy Olmstead president of the SDWF. "Lynn Owens is a great example of how members can leverage the education programs offered by SDWF to become effective philanthropists."

For more information, please visit [www.sdwomensfoundation.org](http://www.sdwomensfoundation.org)<sup>[1]</sup>, or e-mail [tracy@sdfoundation.org](mailto:tracy@sdfoundation.org)<sup>[2]</sup>. The foundation is now accepting proposals for environment grants. The guidelines and application are available on the website.

*Teresa Jacques is a member of the San Diego Women's Foundation.*

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[1] [www.sdwomensfoundation.org](http://www.sdwomensfoundation.org): <http://www.sdwomensfoundation.org/>

[2] [tracy@sdfoundation.org](mailto:tracy@sdfoundation.org): <mailto:tracy@sdfoundation.org>

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