

TIME TO PRESERVE ALL OF SIGN HILL

SOUTHERN SIDE; A Historic Landmark

Whether you are flying into San Francisco International Airport or driving north on Highway 101, the landmark '**South San Francisco The Industrial City**' lettering on our **Sign Hill** makes locals know they are returning home. It is also a major visual point from our front and back yards. For those who have grown up with this historical sight, we often take it for granted and not give a thought to how this land has been preserved, or even how much of this land is publically owned. From the southern view, Sign Hill seems to blend into the larger mountain range of the San Bruno Mountains, and indeed it is the 'little sister' if you will. And it is the northern side, the side that faces the San Bruno Mountain range of our Sign Hill, which is now calling to be preserved.

The southern portion of Sign Hill is publically owned. The painted lettering was originally put on the hill to bring businesses into South San Francisco back in 1923. Due to the success of this endeavor, permanent concrete casted 60 foot high letters were created in 1928 and remain to this day.

This area boasts 30 acres with almost two miles of hiking trails along with a wonderful grove of trees planted by South City resident Mr. Alphonse 'AL' Seubert. Those who knew Al know how hard he worked to create beauty for generations to come. His daughter Evelyn writes in testimony to the back breaking work involved: "Your enjoyment of Sign Hill might be increased by knowing the history of its forest. Before 1960, the hill was covered with grass only, which would vary between green, yellow and burned black - because every year the kids would burn it down as part of their high school initiation. Then my father, Al Seubert (1916-2006), started his quest: to create a forest on that hill. Other people would help - donating or planting trees; but the majority of what you see up there was planted by him over a period of 40 years. He actually planted nearly 40,000 trees; we estimate 10,000 survive to this day. He would grow the trees from seeds in the backyard, and then transplant them to the hill. Before the sprinkling system was installed, he had to carry gallon jugs up the hill to water each little seedling. Can you imagine how he felt every year when the hill would burn? But he never gave up. After every fire, he would go back and plant some more. So if you're hiking on Sign Hill, and you feel it's too cold, or windy, or steep - stand for a minute: the spirit of Al Seubert will inspire you, and keep you going!"

In the winter seasonal months our Holiday Tree on top of the hill is lit from November until January and is eagerly awaited each year. Our US Flag has also flown on special holidays as it was this past Memorial Day, Flag Day and the 4th of July. Many have asked that the our flag remain all year round yet the original pole that holds the wires for the holiday lights could not

bear long term use as a flag pole due to the heavy winds. Recently our city declared the Mission Blue Butterfly as our official butterfly and we look forward to using this as part of our city 'branding'. Our Parks and Recreation Department offer a wonderful two mile nature trek in the Leisure Guide to help residents and visitors get out and enjoy the wonderful vistas and learn about the flora and fauna of the area. Sign Hill has proved to be a treasured jewel to us for so many reasons.

NORTHERN AND EASTERN SIDES; A Developers Delight

While the southern side is protected, and the western side is built up with multiple developments including the Elks Lodge and Stonegate neighborhoods, it is the eastern and northern slopes that are an immediate concern for preservation. Most people see this beautiful open space, the natural topography that graces the backside of our Sign Hill, and do not realize this is privately held and ripe for development. That area of 45 acres is broken into three parcels of 20+ acres each. Local community and those that appreciate the value of this untouched open space are now actively working to find solutions to see this land transferred from private to public hands.

In May I was invited to walk the eastern ridge along with San Bruno Mountain Watch Conservatory Executive Director Ken McIntire, and property developer, Jim Sullivan (Sullivan Land Development LLC), and John Ward (John Ward and Associates) to see what ideas these developers were considering. While the City of South San Francisco zoning allows for one home per acre, the Planning Department officials state that the clustering of homes is a possibility.

Potential point of entrance could come in from Diamond Avenue next to the Guevara's home utilizing the water department's easement with a clustering of twenty 3500 square foot two story homes overlooking the ridge line and down the backside of the hill. Developers agree this would be the best use of infrastructure; sewage, power, water, and roadways. While no formal plans have yet been submitted to the South San Francisco Planning Department the fact that this area is once again being surveyed is a wake up to the rest of us that open space will not remain open without the support of our officials and our community.

Council members agree in sentiment that the area is best as open space, yet the key is finding the right mechanism to see this acreage turned to public lands and also funding any maintenance that comes from public use.

What makes this property so unique is the fact it is untouched, not even grazed upon by cattle, as most of the original space had been done a century ago. Vegetation that is not found elsewhere still thrives here and supports a natural population of insects, reptiles, butterflies

and other wildlife. The fields of Hummingbird Sage that grows naturally on this hillside is the largest in Northern California and the Lupinis is one of the host plants for the Mission Blue Butterfly. Spring time finds a vast array of beautiful wildflowers blooming including the Checkerbloom (*Sidalcea malviflora*), Blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium bellum*), Lomatium caruifolium, and *Iris longipetala* among many others. Once this natural setting is destroyed, it is gone for good. Jake Sigg of the California Native Plant Society states this area “has ... the largest, intact, healthy grouping of grassland habitat in the Bay Area, something not even most locals know.

Because of the biodiversity this region offers, the San Bruno Mountain Watch Conservatory is stepping forward to help navigate the complexities involved in preserving this property. The mission statement of the San Bruno Mountain Watch is dedicated to preserving all the open space and native biodiversity on and around San Bruno Mountain, in perpetuity.

As more and more of our local open space turns into an urban cement jungle, this area provides outdoor enjoyment that needs to be saved for generations to come. The sense of well being, spiritual rejuvenation, exploration, fresh air and exercise coupled with the visual beauty of this area are some of the reasons many have joined in to find ways to preserve the northern and eastern slopes.

DEVELOPERS – Then and Now

A decade or so ago, during the huge building boom, the northwest parcel was actively sought for development. This is the area across from the former Hillside Elementary School , above Larch Avenue. Then Mayor and Council Member Joe Fernekes led the way to help fellow South Citizens retain this area as open space. Even though the formal plans that had been submitted to the Planning Department at that time far exceeded the zoned one home per acre, our city spent tens of thousands of dollars in a legal battle. Due to some prudent fiscal responsibility by our elected officials, our city is currently financially sound, especially when compared to other municipalities, yet we still cannot afford to waste much needed money on future litigation. The Bay Area is once again beginning to see another building boom and these private properties owned by Trusts are not just for the benefit of our visual enjoyment; they are an investment for developers who are waiting for the time to build. Until this acreage is safely turned over to the public we will continue to have this threat of development. John Ward has made several attempts to reach out to locals to share his vision of what this may look like on the eastern ridge. Friends of Sign Hill and San Bruno Mountain Watch Conservatory will be holding a public meeting so basic facts can be shared as well as ideas on how to financially accommodate property owners and retain one of the last largest open spaces in our city.

ACTION PLAN – Attend the Meeting

Date: Tuesday July 17, 2012

Time: 6:30-8:30PM

Where: Paradise Valley Boys and Girls Club (Next to Martin School 291 Hillside Blvd)

More information contact:

Friends of Sign Hill:

Email: FriendsOfSignHill@Yahoo.com

<https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfSignHill>

<http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/FriendsOfSignHillGROUP/>

San Bruno Mountain Watch Conservatory:

Phone: 415/467.6631

Email: Ken McIntire, Executive Director kmcintire@mountainwatch.org

<http://www.mountainwatch.org>

<https://www.facebook.com/SBMtnWatch>

**San Bruno Mountain Watch Conservatory Hosts
Annual Community Pancake Breakfast and Plant Sale**

Save the date for our very popular annual **Gourmet Pancake Breakfast**, coupled again this year with a **Native Plant Sale** - pancakes and plants just seem to be a good combination! It's all happening at our **Mission Blue Nursery** on **Sunday July 29th from 8:30am until 11:30am**. The nursery is bursting with a varied inventory - all perfect for your native garden. Come enjoy some fabulous pancakes plus fixins, check out how the nursery and the demonstration garden have matured - and, of course, enjoy the good company of San Bruno Mountain supporters.

Location: 3445 Bayshore Blvd, Brisbane

More information: 415/467.6631

- [Calendar - San Mateo Daily Journal](#)

www.smdailyjournal.com/news_listing.php?type=calendar

1 day ago – Meeting is hosted by Friends of Sign Hill and *San Bruno Mountain Watch Conservatory*. Open to public. Free. For more information call ...

- [Save Sign Hill | Facebook](#)

<https://www.facebook.com/events/414286785289530/>

San Bruno Mountain Watch Conservatory and Friends of ...Sign Hill will be hosting a meeting to allow us to suss out some alternative options so we can ...

- [Friends of SIGN HILL | Facebook](#)

www.facebook.com/FriendsOfSignHill?v=app_2373072738&ref...

San Bruno Mountain Watch Conservatory and Friends of Sign Hill will be hosting a meeting on TUESDAY JULY 17 at 6:30pm at the Paradise Valley Boys & Girls ...