

Jim Felton

*Jim Felton: A Board President's Perspective on Save Mount Diablo*

Save Mount Diablo Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by  
Shanna Farrell  
in 2021

The Oral History Center would like to thank Save Mount Diablo  
for its generous support of this oral history project.

Since 1953 the Oral History Center of The Bancroft Library, formerly the Regional Oral History Office, has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

\*\*\*\*\*

All uses of this manuscript are covered by a legal agreement between The Regents of the University of California and Jim Felton dated August 28, 2021. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.

For information regarding quoting, republishing, or otherwise using this transcript, please consult <http://ucblib.link/OHC-rights>.

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Jim Felton, "Jim Felton: A Board President's Perspective on Save Mount Diablo" conducted by Shanna Farrell in 2021, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2022.



Jim Felton, 2021, Taken by Bette Felton.

**Abstract**

Jim Felton was born in 1945 in San Francisco, California. His father had close connections at the University of California, Berkeley, where Felton went on to study zoology as an undergraduate. After graduating from UC Berkeley in 1967, he attended SUNY Buffalo where he received his PhD in 1973, worked at the National Institute of Health from 1973 until 1976, and then moved back to the Bay Area to work at Lawrence Livermore Lab. He became involved with Save Mount Diablo and served as a land steward, chair of the development committee, and later board president. In this interview, Felton discusses his early life, interest in the outdoors, education and career, raising two daughters, involvement in Save Mount Diablo, experience as a land steward, importance of the development committee, wife's involvement with Moonlight on the Mountain, relationship with Save Mount Diablo staff members, the importance of board diversity, the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on the organization, and the significance of engaging with the environment.

## Table of Contents

Project History	vi
-----------------	----

### Interview 1: July 14, 2021

Hour 1	1
--------	---

Birth in San Francisco, California in 1945 — Parents and siblings — Close relationship with grandparents — Father's close connections to UC Berkeley — Family vacations instilling love of nature — Differences between East and West Coast landscapes — Undergraduate studies in zoology at UC Berkeley from 1962 to 1967 — Interest in molecular biology — Graduate studies at SUNY Buffalo from 1969 to 1973 — Experience as a Californian in Buffalo — Cancer research with Dr. Kenneth Paigen — Work at National Institute of Health Bethesda from 1973 to 1976 — Work on enzymes — Transition to Lawrence Livermore Lab in 1976 — Carcinogens in overcooked meat — Experiments minimizing carcinogens — First meeting with future wife, Bette — Hiking in the Sierras and in Mount Diablo — Birth of daughters in 1974 and 1977 — Familial experiences in Boston — Nurturing children's interest in outdoors — Introduction to Save Mount Diablo via Ron Brown — Four Days Diablo trip experience — Relationship with Seth Adams and Malcolm Sproul — Stewardship work — Chair of development committee — Experience as steward — Negotiations with neighbors — Collaboration with Phil Fishbacher — Work on Marsh Creek 1 — Fire suppression efforts — Cooperation with fellow stewards — Process of cleaning land — Thursday morning breakfasts — Work with the development committee from 2016

Hour 2	21
--------	----

Importance of the development committee — Sources of interest in the development committee — Wife's involvement with Moonlight on the Mountain — Dick Heron's involvement — Changes to the event due to COVID — Experience making wine — Wife's responsibility for the Contra Costa Public Health foundation — Governance committee responsibilities — Effect of COVID on committee's operations — Board presidency assumption — Professional experience chairing — Ted Clement's leadership of Save Mount Diablo — Scope of the area under conservation — Importance of board diversity — Use of funds from Forever Wild Campaign — Land acquisition and stewardship — Learning Zoom — Potential government assistance — Measure T and political involvement — Magee Ranch — Political consequences of actions — Organizational awareness of climate change — Education and outreach — Mangini Educational Preserve — Relationship with developers — Differences in leadership between Ron Brown and Ted Clement — Individual staff contributors — Future of the organization — Curry Canyon Ranch — Motivation — Significance of engaging with the environment — Health impacts — Hopes for the future

## **Project History**

By the early 1970s, the Bay Area was in the midst of great social and cultural change. With plans for the extension of BART into the East Bay, and suburban sprawl threatening Mount Diablo and other open spaces, Save Mount Diablo (SMD) answered a call to action. SMD was founded by Dr. Mary Bowerman and Arthur Bonwell in 1971. It became a nationally accredited land trust based in the San Francisco Bay Area comprised of biologists, conservationists, hikers, cyclists, equestrians, bird watchers, artists, and people who just loved to look at and enjoy the mountain. SMD has been preserving lands on and around Mount Diablo and educating the public to the mountain's natural values since its founding. However, the organization's focus on educational programs and protecting Mount Diablo's connection to its sustaining Diablo Range has grown substantially over the last few years due in part to new leadership and the growing severity of the climate crisis. As an organization, Save Mount Diablo is both an exceptional example of local land conservation efforts, as well as representative of national and international environmental activism that extends beyond the Bay Area. This oral history project began in 2021 as SMD approached its fiftieth anniversary. All of the interviews were conducted remotely due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

## Interview 1: July 14, 2021

01-00:00:09

Farrell: All right. Okay, this is Shanna Farrell with Jim Felton on Wednesday, July 14, 2021, and this an oral history interview for the Save Mount Diablo Fiftieth Anniversary Project. Jim, can you start by telling me where and when you were born and a little bit about your early life?

01-00:00:30

Felton: Yes, I grew up in San Francisco in the Richmond District. I lived at Twenty-Ninth and Lake Street, which was very close to Lincoln Park, which allowed me a lot of access to the outdoors. My mother wasn't very happy with the fact that I would go with my friends and be a few feet away from a 500-foot drop off a cliff, but we still went there and played. Later on, as I got older, it was a place to play golf for very cheap right around the corner from my house. That was a very nice place to grow up, but of course in those days, there weren't a lot of organized sports like everybody's involved with today with soccer and swimming, so we had to make our own activities.

01-00:01:20

Farrell: What year were you born?

01-00:01:22

Felton: 1945, January.

01-00:01:24

Farrell: Okay, great, so you have memories of San Francisco, the Outer Richmond, in the 1950s?

01-00:01:32

Felton: Well, the big thing I remember the most, which people out here in Danville can't believe, is our mother made me put on a parka in the summertime to go play, it was so cold from the fog. But it was really a safe place, and we played pick-up baseball in the street ignoring the cars that were parked there, which eventually had some dents from our baseballs and things. But it was a very normal childhood and very safe.

01-00:02:07

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents, what their names were and what they did for a living?

01-00:02:14

Felton: Yes, my father was Leland Felton, and he was a radiologist at UC San Francisco in Mount Zion Hospital, and he practiced there for his whole career after World War II. My mother was Jeanne Sichel Felton, and she actually grew up a block away. My grandparents still lived there when I grew up, so when my mother said there was something nasty for dinner like liver, my brother and I would be down at my grandmother's house for dinner, it's great. It was a real family deal.

01-00:02:53

Farrell: How about your brother, can you tell me his name?

01-00:02:55

Felton: I have one brother, and he's four years younger. He went to UCSF dental school and practiced dentistry in the city for many years, just retired.

01-00:03:07

Farrell: What's his name?

01-00:03:08

Felton: Richard.

01-00:03:09

Farrell: Richard, okay. Did the two of you used to play outside a lot together?

01-00:03:14

Felton: Well, four years is quite a bit if you think about it, and I was quite a bit bigger, and he had his own friends. Sometimes, but most of the time, we did our own thing.

01-00:03:25

Farrell: Okay, great, and I know when we talked before, you had mentioned that you spent time camping when you were growing up. Can you tell me a little bit about some of the camping trips you went on, maybe where you went, and some of the things you remember?

01-00:03:38

Felton: Well, there were quite a few. My father really liked the outdoors, and we would spend every summer at the UC Berkeley Alumni Camp because he was a Berkeley alumni, and we had all these friends. Actually, most of his friends were other doctors, so when they came to the Lair of the Bear, if anybody got any sickness, there was a doctor to cover it. But we would go there for a week and then my father would like to use that as a stepping-stone to another outdoor adventure, and a lot of times we went to Yosemite. My mother and father really liked the tent camps they had in the outback in Tuolumne Meadows area, and we would go hiking there in the summers. We did a number of different trips. The most memorable trip of all was we took a trip through the western United States, and we camped in Yellowstone and Glacier and the usual places, the Tetons. When we were in Glacier Park, I think it was, a bear ripped through the tent and ripped the tent to pretty shreds. We might have had food in there, I don't remember as a kid, but my mom was not too keen on camping after that. That ruined some of the camping experience.

01-00:05:07

Farrell: I don't blame her. Did your family know how to handle that situation?

01-00:05:11

Felton: Yeah, my dad was pretty good with that, and of course we made sure all the food was out in the car, but I think we packed up the tent. It was pretty well



ripped, and we stayed in four-wall lodge of some kind on that trip, but that was pretty scary for my mom especially. We weren't in the tent, but we were nearby.

01-00:05:37

Farrell: I can imagine; that sounds scary.

01-00:05:41

Felton: Yeah, but it didn't dissuade myself or my brother or my dad from doing outdoor activities. It was just an event in our life, and that's it.

01-00:05:53

Farrell: So you used to do a lot of hiking and backpacking then as well?

01-00:05:57

Felton: That's right. With Yosemite being so close, once I got older, my friends and I would go backpacking in the summers both in Cherry Creek wilderness, which is north of Yosemite and then a lot in Yosemite itself in the Tuolumne Meadows area, Lyell Glacier, Lyell peak, all those areas. I was not a mountain climber or a rock climber, I didn't use equipment, but my older daughter ended up being quite talented at that and led Outward Bound trips with rock climbing and mountain climbing, so she got into it pretty heavy.

01-00:06:49

Farrell: Oh, wow. I'm wondering if you can think about maybe some of the impact that spending so much time outside growing up had on you as you were growing up and then as you got older?

01-00:07:04

Felton: Well, a very good question. My love for the outdoors was there when I was a kid and it continued on. Obviously when I was in graduate school and postdoc, didn't have quite as much time, but when I had vacation time, my wife and I would go backpacking in Vermont, which was not too far—well it was a little ways but—and I also was very fortunate that I got to spend some of my graduate summers with my professor in Bar Harbor, Maine, and there was a lot of hiking there and so that was a lot of fun to hike around in that area. All that early experience, I just kept it up.

01-00:07:55

Farrell: That's also really interesting. I'm from the East Coast and used to hike a lot on the East Coast, and the landscape and the mountains feel so different there than they do here in the West. Can you describe some of the differences between [those landscapes]?

01-00:08:08

Felton: Well absolutely. When we hike in the west, you hike a while, and you look around, and you got a view usually. I remember hiking in Vermont one time when I never had a view for the entire day. We just hiked in a tree tunnel, a tunnel of trees. It was very different. Actually, we chose some of the sites we hiked because once you got to the top that it would open up some of the

favorite places in Vermont and New Hampshire, But, yeah, it's so different. I remember one time, we had a little dog, a little Labrador, and we were hiking in Vermont, I think it was, in a trail; it was probably Appalachian trail. It had railroad ties to hold the trail together because there's a lot of rain there, and the dog had so much trouble just getting over each tie, and we had to lift him over some of the railroad tie steps. It was just different.

01-00:09:15

Farrell:

Yeah, a little bit more like old and worn on the East Coast and a little bit more manicured, I guess, on the West Coast sometimes.

01-00:09:24

Felton:

Yeah. Of course, the most manicured hiking I've ever done was in Zion Park. There's a portion called Walter's Wiggles on the Angles Landing trail and it looks like somebody's paved garden steps.

01-00:09:42

Farrell:

Yeah. Turning to your education, I know that you attended Cal for undergrad and studied zoology. Can you tell me a little bit about what sparked your interest in zoology?

01-00:09:57

Felton:

Well, first place, people have to understand in those days, there was no biology major. If you were interested in biology, you had to be a zoology major or a botany major. They didn't have biology, or biochemistry was really my interest, but that wasn't an undergraduate major either. So I was a zoology major but I did get the opportunity to take some very interesting—I guess you would call it—wildlife appreciation classes. We'd go out and identify wildlife and you looked around. Berkeley had a great museum of all these specimens and you could go and look at those, and they would test you on that. One of my professors was Professor Leopold, who was the son of the very famous Leopold, probably the father on a lot of the outdoor studies that we have in behavior outside and so this was great. This guy was just a terrific professor. I think I took the standard undergraduate course on zoology from him.

01-00:11:22

We went hiking every Saturday in the Berkeley Hills looking for scat specimens and different birds and it really got my interest in that part; although I really still was interested in why things worked and the molecular parts of things. I took a whole bunch of courses on molecular biology and there was no way to major, I don't think, in that in those days, but some very good virologists and early molecular biologists at Berkeley taught those courses, and they were terrific. That's basically what I did when I went to graduate school and why I continued with that theme.

01-00:12:10

Farrell:

Yeah, and so you went to SUNY Buffalo for your PhD, and I'm wondering if you can tell me a little bit about what you were researching there?

01-00:12:19

Felton:

Well, first place, I want to tell you, the most interesting thing is to come from California and go to Buffalo and have everybody that was local say, "Why are you here?" and I'd say, "Because I want to be here," but they didn't understand why as Californian, we wanted to go to Buffalo. But Buffalo has a pretty bad reputation for weather, although it's not that cold. People don't realize it's not that cold, but it does snow a lot and so we got a lot of snow from the lakes.

01-00:12:48

But I was really interested in cancer research at that time, and there was a professor there at the State University of New York named Dr. Kenneth Paigen who was just an excellent teacher and had very good reputation in mammalian genetics. My thesis was really involved in lysosomal storage disease in mice, and that was one of his specialties. We looked at the molecular aspects of it, we wanted to know what—it wasn't DNA sequencing in those days, but we could go look at different variants of the protein and see which mice did better under certain conditions based on the genetics of their enzymes, and that's what we looked at sugar metabolizing enzymes.

01-00:13:46

Farrell:

What were your career goals at that point in time?

01-00:13:49

Felton:

Well, they changed so much, but I really did want to do molecular studies in cancer and so this was a way to get started. The next step was at the NIH in Bethesda, and there I worked with a very well-known scientist named Daniel Nebert who was very interested in a set of enzymes called cytochrome P450s, and these metabolized environmental chemicals, so that sort of set my life in more of the environmental chemical side. We studied again the same thing, how different levels of these enzymes, how different constructs of these enzymes affected the animal's ability to withstand environmental chemicals, and basically, by withstanding, get mutations or cancer. So that was the start of my interest in environmental chemicals, genetic differences, and exposures, and the outcomes of it.

01-00:14:55

Farrell:

Were you familiar with Rachel Carson and *Silent Spring* at that time?

01-00:14:57

Felton:

Oh, sure.

01-00:14:59

Farrell:

Did that play a role in some of the ways you were thinking about these things?

01-00:15:03

Felton:

Not so much. A lot of these chemicals were bad, but we were trying to figure out who might have—well, let's just take a simple example like smoking. Maybe some of the thinking we were doing is certain people can smoke their whole life, and they're perfectly all right. What's their genetic makeup of their enzymes that allow them to do that, where other people get lung cancer? We

were more interested in who could be exposed and who would have a bad outcome to being exposed, a number of these environmental chemicals. That's where we were back in the mid-'70s, and that's when I came out to Livermore with that background.

01-00:15:52

Farrell:

Yeah. Can you tell me a little bit about your transition from working at the NIH for four years to coming back to California to work at Lawrence Livermore Lab?

01-00:16:03

Felton:

Well, the interesting thing in those days, there wasn't a department of energy, which runs the lab now. There was a department of—I'm trying to think what the name of it was. Some president had changed the name of the group that ran the labs, but it was really involved in both radiation and chemicals, and that was the guts of it. We got a lot of projects in the very beginning to examine oil shale, where there was genetic, environmental, cancer problems related to oil shale because it had some pretty nasty chemicals in it. That's how I got started and then my career switched when our director who was friends with the director of the National Institutes of Environmental Health in North Carolina—that's the only NIH that's not in Bethesda, it's in North Carolina. Anyway, he wanted to validate what the Japanese had just found a chemical in cooked meat that caused high levels of mutations in an assay we were all using called the Ames assay. I don't know if you're familiar with this, but the Ames assay was developed at Berkeley by Bruce Ames. It was convenient, here I am, when I went into their lab, and they taught me how to do it, and we started looking at cooked meat, and I worked on that for twenty-five years. The chemicals in overdone cooked meat are as carcinogenic and mutagenic as any chemical ever found. The only good news is the levels are quite low, so they're low levels, but they're very, very potent. We started looking at well the epidemiology of that: are people that eat more overdone meat going to get more cancer, can we see mutations in these people? All kinds of things we tried, and it was quite a career, and I could go on with a lot more detail if you want.

01-00:18:13

Farrell:

That's fascinating. I'm sure that you published studies based on this, but did you ever try to do any public outreach about that?

01-00:18:23

Felton:

Oh, absolutely. Matter of fact, I had the local TV stations at my house almost every Fourth of July and Labor Day while I was barbecuing wanting to know how to barbecue. It's not just a barbecue problem; it's an overdone meat problem. But, yeah, no we got a lot, and we got our concepts and what we found in the NIH guidelines.

01-00:18:58

Farrell:

Okay, no problem.

01-00:19:06

Felton: Here we go, that won't bother us again.

01-00:19:09

Farrell: No worries.

01-00:19:10

Felton: Anyway, yeah, the NIH took our recommendation in as part of their cancer prevention. If you look on their guidelines, it talks about don't overcook the meat products. We did a lot of work not just on what was there but how to prevent it, could you microwave a piece of meat for a few minutes, would the chemicals that cause these carcinogens come out of the meat, and then could you go barbecue it well done, and the answer is yes. If you put marinade on meat, it slows the cooking down, makes it cooler, and it reduces the levels. We did a lot of work trying to make it a practical thing, not just no, no, no, don't eat meat, but if you eat it, this is what we recommend. Of course, cooking it medium rare—or medium rare was the thing to really do and not overcook it.

01-00:20:07

Farrell: That's fascinating. Just to put a timeline on these things, so I know that you attended Cal from 1962 to 1966. Did you go straight to SUNY Buffalo and Roswell Park right after that?

01-00:20:20

Felton: I hung around for a year. My girlfriend at that time, who's my wife, was in nursing school over at UCSF, so we finished that up, and I started graduated school. Also, I didn't graduate till '67.

01-00:20:38

Farrell: Okay, okay.

01-00:20:40

Felton: And then I hung around for a year and then '69, I headed back to Buffalo, New York.

01-00:20:48

Farrell: Okay, and then when did you graduate?

01-00:20:52

Felton: And that took four years.

01-00:20:53

Farrell: Four years, okay.

01-00:20:54

Felton: In '73, I went to Bethesda to NIH and then in '76, I started here at Livermore.

01-00:21:01

Farrell: Okay, great. You did just mention your wife Bette. Can you tell me about how you met?

01-00:21:08

Felton:

Yeah, we met at Berkeley. We were doing a social event, making sculptures in the mud at the Berkeley Marina, and that's how we first met. She had some real serious family problems. Her sister got really sick and died that summer as we were dating, so she had to go overseas to Bangkok actually and help take care of her sister's kids. We had a time that we were apart, but for the rest of the time, we were together from then on even though we both had to finish school.

01-00:21:48

Farrell:

She came with you to Buffalo and then also to Bethesda?

01-00:21:52

Felton:

Yeah.

01-00:21:54

Farrell:

Okay, what was she—?

01-00:21:54

Felton:

And in the meantime, she was working as a nurse and then getting a master's degree. Then she got a doctor of public health when we came back here at Berkeley.

01-00:22:06

Farrell:

At Berkeley, okay. Where was she getting her master's degree from?

01-00:22:11

Felton:

From the State University of New York, same place that I was getting my PhD.

01-00:22:17

Farrell:

Oh, great, okay, okay. When you came back, okay, so she was getting a master's? Got it, okay.

01-00:22:26

Felton:

Right.

01-00:22:29

Farrell:

So you're back in the Bay Area, and I know it's a few years before you start getting involved with Save Mount Diablo, but you grew up hiking up in the area. During this period of time when you're back and you're working at Lawrence Livermore, are you starting to hike and explore again more in the Bay Area?

01-00:22:52

Felton:

Some in the Bay Area. Actually, we didn't do as much as you might think in Diablo at that time; we'd usually head to the Sierras. We did quite a bit of hiking in the Sierras, the two of us, and some hiking and walking in Diablo. Also, there's a regional park that we liked. We were living in Pleasanton when we first moved back here and so we would go down to a regional park south of there. Boy, for some reason, I can't remember the name. Sunol, Sunol

Regional park, and we did a lot of hiking there. We had dogs, we've always had dogs, so they would go with us. Yeah.

01-00:23:43

Farrell: You mentioned that you have a daughter. Do you have any other children aside from her?

01-00:23:47

Felton: Yeah, I have two daughters. One was born in '74, and one was born in '77. The older one was the one that got into outdoor education and rock climbing and Outward Bound and actually headed up the UC Santa Cruz outdoor educational program for a year.

01-00:24:12

Farrell: Oh, wow.

01-00:24:13

Felton: She was really involved in teaching kids about the outdoors. She must have got some of that from me I suspect.

01-00:24:22

Farrell: Yeah, and what's her name?

01-00:24:24

Felton: Alisa.

01-00:24:25

Farrell: Alisa, okay.

01-00:24:25

Felton: A-L-I-S-A.

01-00:24:27

Farrell: Okay, and how about your younger daughter, what's her name?

01-00:24:31

Felton: Okay, her name is Diana, and she was a little more academic, so she went to Berkeley. She actually lived in the same sorority that my wife did and actually in the same room. She followed us to Berkeley, and then she went to medical school at Davis and is currently an emergency room doctor in Hawaii.

01-00:24:57

Farrell: Oh, wow.

01-00:24:58

Felton: She lives in Hawaii, but she spent six years at Harvard in Boston getting her residency and further training and with an expertise in toxicology, but I don't know where that came from, but somehow she got involved in that. She loved the call-in emergency tox line, these poison control centers, so she worked at that and got a fellowship at Boston Children's in that field. And then if you have a minute to listen to this story, she and her husband, he's from Boston—

she met him there—they went through a pretty bad winter in Boston, it was really nasty, and they said, "Why are we living here?" So they put their stuff in a box and got on their bicycles and started riding across the country and rode all the way to Danville, all the way here. It took them three months and she wasn't in an excellent shape because she had been doing all that academic stuff, but he was in much better shape, but they managed to make it. It took them three months to cross the Rockies and then they went on to Hawaii where they had jobs lined up.

01-00:26:26

Farrell: That's incredible. Also, I went to undergrad in Boston, and I certainly understand the weather and the winter.

01-00:26:35

Felton: Which school did you go to?

01-00:26:37

Farrell: I went to Northeastern for undergrad.

01-00:26:39

Felton: Sure. That's where my son-in-law went to law school.

01-00:26:43

Farrell: Oh, okay, great, yeah.

01-00:26:45

Felton: He had a very interesting experience with law school. It wasn't just law, but he had like a year of public health that was part of his law school experience.

01-00:26:54

Farrell: That's interesting.

01-00:26:55

Felton: I don't understand, they had to have more than just the law school. He was interested in public transportation, basically in low income areas people relied on public transportation. Not quite sure about his thesis, but it was about minority use of public transportation. But then he went on to work for the state of Massachusetts as an environmental lawyer in energy and related to the public utility commission and was their representative in law cases with energy companies, then he took the same kind of job in Hawaii.

01-00:27:48

Farrell: Wow.

01-00:27:48

Felton: Hawaii is going 100 percent renewables, so he fits right in, and he works for the state.

01-00:27:58

Farrell: I'm sensing a lot of themes in your family between medicine and research and environmental things and also spending time outside. It's really interesting to



hear that your daughter, Alisa, was so involved in Outward Bound and rock climbing and outdoor education and then your daughter, Diana rode across-country on a bicycle. When they were growing up, did you take them camping and introduced [them to nature]?

01-00:28:27

Felton:

Oh, absolutely, but we did a lot of things. We tried to get them interested in anything outdoors, so. They played sports in high school but then we always went skiing numerous times every winter in the Sierras. We like to go to Hawaii around Christmas, so they got into, with me, scuba diving, so they're very good at that as well. We just tried to introduce them to everything, and we had a sailboat at Tahoe. They haven't really got into that too much, but I used to like to do that. Anything outdoors, they were exposed to.

01-00:29:08

Farrell:

That's fantastic, yeah. Shifting to your involvement with Save Mount Diablo, so I know that your initial involvement was through a four-day hike. But before that, before you started working with them, how did you first learn of Save Mount Diablo and the work that they were doing?

01-00:29:29

Felton:

That's a very interesting question. It actually comes from my wife who worked on so many different nonprofit committees. It might have been through Cal State East Bay, which then was Cal State Hayward, which had a Concord campus, and she was the dean at the Concord campus. This is after doing a nursing teaching career, she went into the administration. I think on their board was Ron Brown from Save Mount Diablo [the Executive Director].

01-00:30:05

Farrell:

Brown?

01-00:30:06

Felton:

Brown, Ron Brown. I think she met him there. She was also part of the workforce board in Contra Costa County, and she might have met him there as well. But anyway, she met Ron, he suggested the Four Days Diablo trip, and that sort of started it.

01-00:30:27

Farrell:

When she first came home after meeting Ron, do you remember the conversation that you had about potentially doing the four-day hike? Or was it a pretty seamless like, hey, let's do this, this is in our backyard?

01-00:30:41

Felton:

It was her suggestion. She said, "They have this shepherded four-day hike on Diablo and Ron Brown and Save Mount Diablo." We hadn't done much with them or given them any financial support, so, yeah, that started us, but I was excited to try that. Both of us were pretty physically fit then, so we weren't

too worried about completing the four days, although it was fairly tiring after four days of hiking straight. They took really good care of us.

01-00:31:19

Farrell: Had you hiked Mount Diablo before that?

01-00:31:23

Felton: Yeah, at different hikes around Rock City and around Curry Point, different areas but never anything that extensive.

01-00:31:38

Farrell: Okay, okay. Can you tell me a little bit more about your experience on that four-day hike, maybe who you met, what you saw?

01-00:31:47

Felton: Yeah. Well, of course, it was led by Seth Adams, and he was a very impressive guy with his knowledge. Also on the hike was Malcolm Sproul who has this incredible knowledge of birds, so I was really impressed. I mean he could tell a male from a female falcon at distances that I could barely see the bird, and he was terrific. We had that and then there was a botanist on the trip too, I can't remember if it was Heath Bartosh, but it could've been who knew so much about the flowers. The reason they have to hike that time of the year is it's not too hot and there's a lot of flowers out on Diablo. There was just so much to see that I really hadn't seen, I was really impressed. Really nice. I mean it wasn't, I don't know what they called it, glamping? We had great meals each night, and it was just a lot of fun, and I learned a tremendous amount. The most memorable part of the hike was we were walking off trail in a meadow-type environment out at Curry Point, I guess it was, and Seth said, "Look, don't look, I mean look down quick." There was a rattlesnake about two feet from my leg who was making a lot of noise, so I just stood there. That was a little scary.

01-00:33:24

There was another instance early in the hike where rattlesnakes were trying to get into the burrows of the ground squirrels. The ground squirrels were putting on a performance to look bigger and more active and trying to keep the rattlesnakes away from their burrows, and that was really an interesting biology experience to see them behave like that.

01-00:33:59

Farrell: You had mentioned the meals. Do you remember what kinds of things you were eating on that first four-day hike?

01-00:34:06

Felton: Boy, now you're talking memory. I think we had a steakhouse do one meal, so there were some steaks, and there was always wine of course. I supply a lot of the wine now, I can tell you about that story if you want later. But we have a winery here at the house, and I supply a lot of the wine that Save Mount Diablo uses for various events.

01-00:34:34

Farrell:

Yeah, that'll be great. We'll talk about that a little bit, that'll be great.

01-00:34:37

Felton:

But I can't remember that much. Sunrise Bistro supplied a lot of really nice lunches and breakfasts, I remember that. But then we took over the breakfasts, as I mentioned, when we started on Thursday mornings for the next seven, eight years I think. Because my wife besides being a dean and members of all these nonprofits also was a partial owner of a bakery here in Danville. We would get pastries and have them baked and use them for breakfast, and it was great.

01-00:35:21

Farrell:

What's the bakery called?

01-00:35:23

Felton:

It was called Pascal's French Oven. They no longer own it, she and her girlfriends. There were four of them together that owned it, but it was really good and then it got bought out by a guy that just wasn't as good at running a bakery.

01-00:35:47

Farrell:

Mm-hmm, yeah. You mentioned that you had met Seth and Malcolm, and you were impressed with their knowledge. Was education a big part of the four-day hikes?

01-00:35:58

Felton:

I think so. For most of the people, not everybody, some people just wanted to be more on their own, but most people stuck right with the hike leaders to hear what we were saying, and I mean it was everything from, "Oh, there's the ridge that's higher than Mount Tamalpais," which people couldn't believe, "over there by Blackhawk Ridge," to just listening to all kinds of stories. Seth not only knows all the wildlife, but he knows all the attempts for people to build developments on Mount Diablo, so it was combination of biology and sort of land development. I learned a lot there.

01-00:36:54

Farrell:

Was he pretty open about that? Would he talk about the deals that were trying to go through and didn't or—?

01-00:37:01

Felton:

Oh, absolutely. He's just been involved in so many years. No, he wasn't afraid of offending anybody and gave us the real story. Now, he's still involved up to his earlobes in development in the Diablo area especially up in Pittsburg, Antioch, that area.

01-00:37:28

Farrell:

Yeah. How about the length of the hikes each day? Do you know how many miles you were going each day?

01-00:37:35

Felton:

I think they averaged about eight, but of course they weren't flat, they were up and down, but it averaged about eight miles a day. Of course, on the last day, as had happened maybe the year before, the rains came, and there was incredible downpour in late May, and we had to actually cut the hike short on the last day. We got pretty wet.

01-00:38:05

Farrell:

Yeah, that sounds like it could be dangerous. What kind of people go on the hikes?

01-00:38:12

Felton:

That's a really good question; I think all different kinds. There were people like us that were interested in the nature part of it but others I think we're interested in just seeing the area. There were people that might have been there just for the dinners, I don't know, [laughter] but it was a combination. In those days, it wasn't as pricey as it is now, but still in those days, I think it was \$800 or \$ 700, I can't remember. That's not for everybody and so you would tend to find people in their fifties and sixties, let's say, would be the average age.

01-00:39:02

Farrell:

Okay.

01-00:39:03

Felton:

There weren't a lot of twenty-year-olds.

01-00:39:06

Farrell:

Okay, got you. After this first experience with Save Mount Diablo, how did that connect you to the land and deepen your interest in getting involved with the organization?

01-00:39:20

Felton:

Well, as we talked before, I really got involved in thinking about, well, how could I help and play a role? Of course, I was working full time, but I did meet this George Phillips who worked with John Gallagher. George was a staff member, John Gallagher was the—I think the board member that was working on stewardship. I said, "What can I do?" I talked to Ron Brown about it too. At that point, John Gallagher was the steward chair for a piece of property called Marsh Creek 1, and he said, "You know, I'm kind of tired of doing the stewardship." Just to explain, stewardship meant checking on the property pretty much once a month or more, making sure nobody is growing marijuana on the property, with making sure there aren't cattle roaming the property, all that type of stuff, and just make sure the fences aren't down. I took that on as my first, it was about ten acres, and I would go out there once a month, hike around. It got me a chance to go hiking, and even with ten acres, it was pretty steep, so it was a bit of a hike at the top of the ridge. That's how it started and then things just went on from there.

01-00:40:51

As you know, I joined the development committee. They thought I could help raise funds, which is the purpose of the development committee, and before I knew it somebody said, "We don't have a chair, would you be the chair?" I became the chair of the development committee. It evolved there when Malcolm Sproul had done like ten years of board chair service and then Scott Hein came in and did six years and they didn't have anybody that wanted to do it in the meantime. Malcolm came back for one more year and then I was convinced that I could do this for three years, so I'm about in the middle of my three-year stint as the president.

01-00:41:44

Farrell:

Yeah, and I want to get to all this in a minute, but I do want to back a little bit and talk about your stewardship. You talked a little bit about what you needed to do and I'm curious about the time commitment. Were you going more than once a month or were you pretty much averaging?

01-00:41:59

Felton:

Well, it was once a month to check it out. From my house, it's almost a forty-five minute drive because you have to go up to Clayton from Danville and then south on Marsh Creek Road, so that was about forty-five minute each way. Sometimes I would try to link it with my trips out to Livermore Lab, but it was about a half an hour north of the lab to go there, so it added even a little more time. Most of the time, it was checking things out but then there were jobs to do. We found bamboo or Arundo it's called, Arundo in the creek in our property, and we wanted to get it out of there because it tends to spread, and it's a very invasive species. I spent quite a few hours digging and using a pick just getting that out of the creek, and it hasn't come back. I felt that was probably the most noticeable thing I did out there.

01-00:43:01

Farrell:

Yeah, and that can be a fire hazard too, right?

01-00:43:05

Felton:

I'm not sure about that, but it's just very, very invasive, and it gets pieces break off, go in the creek, and then root themselves so that you'll find it all through the systems. For the creeks here in Danville, one of our very active members at Save Mount Diablo, is a guy named Dick Heron who's a very good friend of John Gallagher's, a good friend of mine, and he heads up the local creek restoration group. He's constantly pulling Arundo out of San Ramon Creek and other creeks in our area. It's really an amazing, invasive thing; it looks like bamboo.

01-00:43:52

Farrell:

Is there a cost associated with being a steward?

01-00:43:57

Felton:

Just gas and time.

01-00:44:01

Farrell: Okay, so you don't have to pay to be a steward?

01-00:44:03

Felton: No, no.

01-00:44:04

Farrell: Okay, okay.

01-00:44:06

Felton: When I first started, we used to get together maybe four times a year, all the stewards and talk about the problems and things that needed fixing. Of course, I'd go to a site that wasn't mine to watch and help with the fence or help with some problem that needed fixing. We went out near Curry Canyon, there's another property out there where the culvert got full of trees, and we all decided to climb in there and pull them out. For old guys, it was a pretty strenuous projects, but no, no cost but time really and a sore back.

01-00:44:53

Farrell: Do you remember or do you know how many stewards there are usually?

01-00:44:58

Felton: Well, with a dozen or so properties, and some of the properties are big like Curry Canyon has three or four, so my guess is maybe twenty. But I don't know—John Gallagher knows that. Are you interviewing him?

01-00:45:14

Farrell: I believe my colleague is, yeah.

01-00:45:17

Felton: Yeah, so that'll come out. He's been shepherding the stewards for many, many years acting as the chair of that group.

01-00:45:28

Farrell: When you first became a steward and you were talking to John, what were some of the things he was impressing upon you in terms of how to best be a steward or what are the best practices or something?

01-00:45:42

Felton: Oh, there's another part of being steward we didn't talk about; it's dealing with the neighbors of these properties. In this case, it turned out that there were neighbors on both sides that were problems. The neighbor to the north was renting a—it's a long story but was renting one of these portable-type houses that come in a trailer and then they'd go in the ground, and he had some horses there. He was pretty sick, and he was not a nice guy. On the other side was a contractor. I guess he resented the fact that there was a right of way on his road for us to come into the property, and he was pretty nasty. John was a bow-and-arrow and gun-type guy and so you had to be a little careful. He impressed on me to call these guys when I was coming out, make sure they knew somebody was going to be there. Now since the property where the

trailer was, was acquired by Save Mount Diablo, and we took the trailer away and gave it to one of the ranchers actually on Mount Diablo, and they took it and rolled it up to Petaluma I think. That piece of property, which is called Marsh Creek 7, is right adjacent Marsh Creek 1, has no structures, and it's a beautiful piece of property. The two combined then are about seventeen acres right on the creek.

01-00:47:22

Farrell:

When you would call those neighbors to let them know that you would be there, how did they respond to you?

01-00:47:30

Felton:

They were actually a lot nicer then—I think they just didn't like people they didn't know that were trespassing. Especially the guy whose property we had the right of way, the contractor, he said, "Come on out." Yeah, he was fairly decent, but if you went out there and didn't check in with him, then he was not happy, he'd call. I think he called Ron Brown or somebody. He wouldn't be afraid to say, "Who's out on my property?"

01-00:48:05

Farrell:

Oh, wow.

01-00:48:05

Felton:

The amazing thing that I learned over the years on some of these—we've had events for neighbors, some of our sites, and barbecues and things, and some people really like Save Mount Diablo in the neighborhood and some people just don't like them at all, and they were really nasty. It's too bad because what we're doing is preventing somebody from building ten houses next door to them, but they didn't like it. They saw it almost as government-intrusion type, that type of behavior.

01-00:48:40

Farrell:

Interesting.

01-00:48:42

Felton:

There's still some of those people out there. I don't have to deal with them; Ted does I guess, but there's a lot less. The guy that was a problem with the trailer, he was just sick, and he just didn't feel good. I can't remember if he had a heart disease or cancer or whatever, but he was just not a nice guy.

01-00:49:04

Farrell:

Yeah, and how long were you a steward for?

01-00:49:11

Felton:

I don't quite get the question. You mean when did I stop being a steward?

01-00:49:14

Farrell:

Yeah, like how many years did you steward the land for?

01-00:49:18

Felton: Well, it turns out that I'm still the steward even though I'm chairman of the board.

01-00:49:21

Farrell: Oh, okay.

01-00:49:22

Felton: That was in 2009, and this is eleven years I've been doing the same piece of property.

01-00:49:30

Farrell: Are you still going out once a month around?

01-00:49:32

Felton: No, I actually recruited a retired clinical oncologist Phil Fishbacher to go six times a year, and I went six times a year.

01-00:49:44

Farrell: Oh, great.

01-00:49:44

Felton: He's a neighbor of mine and so we share it. It makes it a lot easier, so I only go six times a year basically.

01-00:49:54

Farrell: Okay. It's interesting, I know that there have been some fires on Save Mount Diablo including one this week. How much did that affect your land if at all?

01-00:50:07

Felton: Well, we were lucky that the new guy that bought the house where I was having trouble with, the contractor, had a good mower, and he would mow down the weeds frequently, so we had some real fire suppression going on, keeping the weeds down all in that area even into our property across the creek next to the road. I think we've done what we can, we've been fortunate we haven't had a fire in that area. Of course, some of our other properties obviously have—well, Marsh Creek 4 burned completely, but, yeah, we've been very fortunate.

01-00:50:57

One other thing though that's exciting about where I do the stewardship is there's a lot of old Indian ruins just across the creek on our property with these grinding holes that the local coastal Indians ground acorns in. There's been a lot of interest in these. I don't know there's a special name for these grinding holes.

01-00:51:27

Farrell: Yeah, I'm curious with being a steward of the land and given the indigenous history of the mountain. Was John Gallagher or anyone else trying to impress upon you, this is historically how this land has been managed or cared for? Has that been part of the conversation at all?



01-00:51:47

Felton:

Yeah, I think so. It wasn't the center. We're more worried about immediate problems like people trying to grow marijuana on the property or something like that, but we did talk about it, there's no question about it. The interesting thing is the new head staff member for stewardship is a guy named Sean Burke. He has Native American roots, and he also was a park ranger for the regional parks, and he's very familiar with these Indian ruins and artifacts, so he was so excited to see what was at Marsh Creek 1 and 7.

01-00:52:33

Farrell:

That's great, yeah. Were there any techniques or land management practices that were being discussed with you that you were thinking about implementing on Marsh Creek 1?

01-00:52:47

Felton:

Not directly. I mean we had a problem with some cattle that got into the area on the upper part of the ridge. We had to fix the fence, because the cattle would put some pretty sizeable holes just in the ground. Of course, there's a group, I don't know if you've, in your interviews, heard about this. There's a group called the Trail Dogs, which have now become more closely associated with Mount Diablo—Save Mount Diablo—but they were an independent group back then. But they volunteer for Mount Diablo property to build trails. We built a loop trail on Marsh Creek 1 that went up to the top of the ridge and then down a different side. One year I was out there in the spring and there was a huge hole about two feet in diameter and maybe two feet deep right in the middle of the trail. Somebody had taken horses up there, and it was so muddy that the horses actually went down in the mud. We had to redo a lot of the trail, that type of thing.

01-00:54:05

Farrell:

Okay, okay.

01-00:54:07

Felton:

Not too much really. The Arundo is the most comprehensive thing I fixed on that land besides the fences.

01-00:54:17

Farrell:

Yeah, and then thinking about fire suppression, did John, or now Sean, are they talking to the stewards about fire suppression methods?

01-00:54:29

Felton:

Oh, very much so. We have whole emails that go out and then I think we had a get-together talking about what need to be done and which properties were most vulnerable and things like that. Save Mount Diablo has a collection of Weedwackers that we go out, and pretty much younger people, volunteers, go out and really hit these properties hard in the spring, cut the weeds back. Yeah, it's a big thing. Not much though related to trees, it's mostly related to grasses.

01-00:55:06

Farrell:

Okay. How often would the stewards, all twenty-ish stewards, get together and meet and talk about some of the stuff that was going on in each of their land or property?

01-00:55:19

Felton:

Yeah, well, we used to get together about four times a year, and Seth was involved too in those days. Then it kind of fell off, and that was more after George left as head of the stewards. Then there was a gap, and there was nobody, and it all kind of fell through and then COVID hit, so we haven't actually started again. I'm hoping that Sean will start more than Zoom, get people together and let them talk about the properties because they all have different needs, all the properties.

01-00:55:52

Farrell:

Yeah. That's really interesting, too, how one range can have so many different needs.

01-00:55:58

Felton:

We had a guy, I don't know if you'll hear his name, his name was Burt Bogardus, and he was an ex-state park ranger, but he was an expert on removing barbed wire from properties, and he actually devised a jack-type gadget where he could lift the posts that the barbed wire was hooked to out of the ground, and he was just there. Anytime we needed barbed wire removed, we called and Burt would come out. It was some hard work, but we removed a lot of barbed wire from a lot of these properties. I don't know if you've talked to anybody about when we took on Curry Canyon, which was a thousand acres plus but it was a typical ranch where the ranchers had dumped piles everywhere, just junk and dump, and it took us more than a year to just clean up. I think that's one thing that Save Mount Diablo has done very well to all their properties is make them as close to pristine as we can. Some of these ranches, they just had different goals.

01-00:57:13

Farrell:

Yeah. That's interesting. So I know that you and Bette also got more involved in the hiking and you said you took over—now you're in charge of the Four Days Thursday morning breakfasts. At what point did you start organizing those hikes or getting involved in that way?

01-00:57:37

Felton:

I mean we really never did. It was usually as the same group that set up the meals, People like Shannon Grover. Dick Heron set up the facilities with John Gallagher. The same people kept doing it and then Seth would lead the hikes. We never really got involved in the actual organization of that event, but we did set up the breakfast for probably thirty to forty people all those years. But then we got more involved in the development together, and we can go into that when you want.

01-00:58:28

Farrell:

Yeah. Well, I'm curious at what point you did start to take over those Thursday morning breakfasts. Was it the year after you did that first hike or was it later?

01-00:58:37

Felton:

It was within a year, it could have been two years later, probably 2010, 2011, I just can't really remember.

01-00:58:45

Farrell:

Okay, okay. and what kind of things do you make for breakfast that morning?

01-00:58:50

Felton:

Well, of course, as a I said, when my wife owned the café, we had great pastries, and we always made eggs and bacon for everybody. It was eggs and bacon, juice, pastries, that was pretty standard, and fruit, we always made fruit. That's pretty much what we tried to do later. We'd go to the local market here, Lunardi's, and order pastries. We just paid for them, and we'd bring those and make the eggs and bacon, then we had some neighbors that were starting to like it too and getting them involved. Paul Fitzpatrick and his wife Kathy, Dennis Miller and his wife Carolyn, and who else, Tom Crosby, and these are neighbors of ours who got involved. The only downside to the whole thing is you had to get up there at 6:30, quarter to 7:00 in the morning to start preparing the meal. But the guys that were pretty much running the Four Days, John Gallagher, Dick Heron, Bob Cooper, Bruce Bilodeau, Sue Pitsenbarger, Deborah Wexler, and they'd have coffee going and water boiling and all the equipment set out. It wasn't that hard; they did the hard work.

01-01:00:04

Farrell:

Yeah. Okay, so now turning to your work on the development committee, you started working with them around 2016, is that right?

01-01:00:16

Felton:

I think that's close, plus or minus, yeah.

01-01:00:20

Farrell:

Okay, great. When you first started working with them, who were some of the people who were on that committee?

01-01:00:31

Felton:

Well, Karen Ferriere was the staff person and still is. I think Julie, Julie was the person that worked with Ron Brown, and left. I don't know what year exactly Julie left, but Karen then took over. Julie might have been there the first year or two. So that was the staff people. Then the committee was, well—hmm, I'm trying to remember who is on. I should've brought that up. [Two notable members: Claudia Hein and Bob Marx who are long supporters and members.]

01-01:01:09

Farrell:

We can always add that in later too, that's fine.

01-01:01:13

Felton: But I should know all the—sorry, I can't pull that one out of my brain.

01-01:01:21

Farrell: That's okay, we can add it in to the transcript, that's no problem.

01-01:01:26

Felton: Okay.

01-01:01:28

Farrell: Can you tell me what the role of the development committee is in the larger Save Mount Diablo organization? Like how important are they in the functioning of the organization?

01-01:01:41

Felton: Critical, because the development committee is responsible for actually bringing in the income for the organization. We deal with sponsors, we deal with all kinds of donors, and we also help put on the events that would attract income like Moonlight on the Mountain. But there were a lot of other events that we would have—breakfasts at the headquarters and speakers, and development was involved in all of that. So, yeah, without it, you don't have an organization. You had to bring in the money.  
It wasn't necessarily my expertise, and matter of fact, I always felt uneasy going up to somebody and just discussing money even though we set it up that the volunteers like myself didn't actually do what they call the ask. I've learned all these terms. That was done by the professionals, by the Save Mount Diablo people like Karen and Ted and so that's the ask. But we get the people there, and we get them excited and work with them, and that was our job and to put on the events.

01-01:02:59

Farrell: How would you get people involved? How do you think about getting people interested in the organization?

01-01:03:07

Felton: Well, that's really a good question. I mean some people get interested because there's a social event like Moonlight on the Mountain. Other people get involved because they were interested in these more scientific talks, in the mornings at the headquarters. Other people got involved because they wanted to get out. This oncologist that I work with Phil Fischbacher on Marsh Creek 1, he wanted to just get out and get into the outdoors and the woods. He never comes to meetings, and he doesn't get involved that way, but he gets involved just by being outdoors. I think it was a combination of a lot of different things and then of course there's the people that just feel this is gorgeous, wilderness within very close proximity to a huge metropolitan area and want to help save it. I think that's probably the majority of the people just want to preserve what we have and maybe make it even a little better.

01-01:04:15

Farrell: Mm-hmm. What were some of the programs that were particularly interesting to you and Bette?

01-01:04:27

Felton: Bette started getting more involved in this Moonlight on the Mountain and helped to actually organize the event. She got involved in that. I went out there a number of years, I was a little bit younger, and helped to clear the land and set up the required setting. This same fellow, Dick Heron, is always there. Whenever you look under the covers, Dick Heron, he was out doing a lot of the setup, I tried to go with him, and help him. He'd actually sleep out the night of Moonlight. He'd stay in the back of his truck or his van and stay overnight just to make sure everything was okay. He's a great guy, and he's a PhD food engineer, worked for Del Monte.

01-01:05:22

Farrell: Oh, wow.

01-01:05:22

Felton: —but could fix anything, he can do anything. Dick's an amazing guy, and he was also a trail runner, so he'd run twenty, thirty miles. One day, his wife dropped him off near Stockton, maybe a little closer to Diablo but in that area, and he ran home over the mountain, through Danville, probably ran thirty miles or more. He's just an amazing guy. Anyway, so he was always there helping, but I think we helped with that and then one thing we did is we do have a lot of friends, a lot of different associates for different parts of our lives. It's just amazing how many people Bette knows especially.

01-01:06:12

One of the things we did more than anything was to invite a lot of people to the event, and some we paid for and some paid for themselves, because it's pretty pricey. It started probably at \$100 a head and then it went up even more than that in recent years. But we would end up paying for a number of people, either they couldn't afford it or they never asked, and we just paid for them. A couple of years ago, we had two tables of twenty people that were our guests.

01-01:06:54

Farrell: I know that you feel like Moonlight on the Mountain is a really special occasion. I'm wondering if you can describe what the event looks like, maybe how the tables are set up or what some of the sounds you're hearing, some of the food, some of the music?

01-01:07:11

Felton: Very good point. It's on a flat mesa area on this ridge right next to what's called China Wall, which is a geological formation that's pretty unique, a lot of just outcroppings. We'd light that up with spotlight, so as the sun goes down, it is all beautifully lit, and the visuals are really amazing. Of course some years, you get the moon like I have in my backdrop here, some years, it doesn't always work out that way. But that would come up over Mount Diablo

because that's where the moon would come up from there, so that was just amazing.

01-01:07:55

One of the other things we did, some of the years, it was very cold and the cold wind would come in, and some years, it was very hot, it varied tremendously in September. But the great thing was the views were just amazing. A photographer from recent years would set up a frame and have people stand inside the frame and have the mountain there with them in the frame—we've seen some great pictures of couples and four people, six people—so people have the memories of that. The whole thing is set up, about 500 people with all roundtables, so you can imagine there's a lot of tables there. There's fifty tables, and it's all served by Sunrise Bistro who was the caterer, and they prepared everything up there. They had kitchen tents, it was an amazing production, and it was all served. You didn't have to do a buffet line, so it's really classy. Of course there was a band, and the band played not too much rap. They played mostly music that would appeal to the ears of people from fifty to seventy probably because that was the majority of people. There's a lot of '60s, '70s, '80s music, and it was amplified a little more than I like. It was pretty loud, but a lot of people danced. It was just a fun, fun event, and it was outdoors, it's a good cause.

01-01:09:42

I don't know if you talked to people about the finances of it, but it cost a lot to put on, so you have to pay for a fire department, they're there, you have to pay for the band, you have to pay for the food, and a lot of rentals and stuff and so there was a big expense, but there was a lot of money coming in. But the net amount that we made under the normal moonlight was not that different than what happened last year where we just asked people to donate. We had some events on by video, by Zoom, but we had people donate and then of course there's a live auction and silent auctions, all that typical stuff that we do, and I put my wine in the silent auction. It usually goes anywhere from thirty to forty dollars a bottle, so it was pretty cool.

01-01:10:36

Farrell: You're referencing the fact that in 2020, the event couldn't happen in-person because of COVID?

01-01:10:44

Felton: Correct. I'm sorry, I didn't make that clear.

01-01:10:47

Farrell: It's okay, it's more for the record.

01-01:10:48

Felton: But it was very interesting I think to the staff and for all of us to see. Now, as far as the net income to the organization, whether we did the event or didn't do the event was about the same because the event had a high cost to it. Of course it was fun, it was a way to get people involved, maybe those people

were so excited, they gave a lot more money later, but as far as the actual event goes, it was a wash pretty much in revenue and so that was interesting.

01-01:11:20

Farrell: Yeah, and can you tell me a little bit about the wine that you make and that you donate?

01-01:11:26

Felton: Right. We have two acres here in Danville. One acre is in vines, and we have seven different varieties and so we got involved. I started doing this in 2002, planted the grapes, by 2006 and '07, we started to make wine from them. I don't want to brag, but we've done very well. We had a local Contra Costa regional home winemakers' club, about seventy families, and our Grenache Rosé won best in show two years ago.

01-01:12:10

Farrell: Great.

01-01:12:11

Felton: We've sent some of our wine back to Vermont where they have the international home winemakers wine tasting, about 2500 entries of all different kinds, fruit wines, every variety you can think of, and our Syrah that we submitted there won first place.

01-01:12:30

Farrell: Wow.

01-01:12:30

Felton: So for a little home winemaker in Danville, we've done pretty good. I think all the molecular biology training.

01-01:12:40

Farrell: So you grow Grenache and Syrah. Anything else?

01-01:12:43

Felton: And Merlot and Zinfandel.

01-01:12:44

Farrell: Oh, wow, okay. How did you first learn how to make wine?

01-01:12:50

Felton: Well, as I said, part of it was lucky that I had a background in molecular biology and microbiology, so I knew how to ferment things. But we took a couple of weekend courses, read a bunch of books, read quite a few books and then joined this county club, which has monthly meetings, and they talk about making wine in different ways. I think we got better and better as we've been able to learn from other people.

01-01:13:20

Farrell: Oh, that's great. This is an aside, but how many bottles or cases do you make a year?

01-01:13:28

Felton: We used to do about 700 but now about 500. This year, we just two weeks ago bottled 500 bottles.

01-01:13:35

Farrell: Oh wow, okay.

01-01:13:38

Felton: We give it all away, we don't sell any. My wife's involved in—Save Mount Diablo's one of about half a dozen nonprofits that she's involved in. I'm the chair of this, but she's the chair of nonprofits including the county public health foundation. We give to their galas, we give wine for dinner, or we give wine for an auction, and we give to the Rossmoor Opera Club. People come to us. There's a Catholic retreat that's just up the hill from our house on the next street over called San Damiano, and they have different kinds, a lot of marriage retreats and other things but there's Franciscan brothers that live there actually. The next couple of days, they're having a fundraiser, so we're donating some wine to them. So it's all donated stuff.

01-01:14:44

Farrell: That's great. You said that Bette was pretty involved in the organization of the event Moonlight on the Mountain, and aside from recruiting people and then also paying for tables, what else is she responsible for in terms of organizing the event?

01-01:15:01

Felton: Well, some things have been pretty much by association. Since she was the dean at Cal State East Bay Concord, which is a beautiful campus and has beautiful views of Mount Diablo, it's off Ygnacio Road. When they were doing lighting of the beacon on Diablo, a few years ago there was predicted snow on that December seventh. Somebody thought maybe Cal State could help, so they contacted Bette, and she talked to the current dean, and they set up a whole ceremony there. It was about four years ago or five years ago, and they've had a ceremony now ever since at Cal State to celebrate the beacon and the Pearl Harbor survivors. It's a good location. So she gets involved in things that way.

01-01:16:06

Of course, the Contra Costa Public Health foundation was just a small group of people that was overseeing, helping the residents with international travel. It was probably about \$100,000 a year that was raised and used and then COVID hit, and there's no way to give government agencies money from nonprofits. They realized that if they could give it to Bette's foundation, she could then distribute it to the county, so millions and millions of dollars have come across her hands. She wasn't set up for this; she had to hire an executive director. But the Zuckerbergs and Silicon Valley Foundation gave money to all the Bay Area counties and so she was the one that had to deal with all this Contra Costa money coming in and then distributing it to seventy different agencies in the county. She's been busy lately.



01-01:17:07

Farrell: Yeah, it sounds like she had a busy COVID.

01-01:17:10

Felton: Yeah.

01-01:17:12

Farrell: You also got involved in the governance committee. Can you tell me a little bit about what the role of that committee is?

01-01:17:21

Felton: If you're a chair of a committee like development or the land committee or the finance committee, then that automatically puts you on the governance committee. The governance committee just meets a few times a year, but mainly, it's to get new members of the board, and to look at the rules and regulations of the nonprofit. Are we meeting all the standards and things like that? It's pretty boring actually, but it has to be done and so that's what the governance committee—so it's really the chairs of the different committees. The president's automatically part of the executive committee but their individuals are picked from the overall twenty members of our, I think, nineteen members of our board. Some people volunteered and had been asked to serve on the executive committee. It makes more executive decisions on things, more related—well, we had to make a decision whether we were going to apply for COVID money and get approval from the board. What the exec committee does is look at things first and then it looks like it's the right thing, then it takes it to the overall board. It's more of a small group of people to kind of, the people like Ted to try things out on.

01-01:18:57

Farrell: Okay, thank you for clarifying.

01-01:18:58

Felton: The exec committee though is important because we had to decide whether we were going to apply for COVID money for Save Mount Diablo and things like that.

01-01:19:12

Farrell: Did you end up applying for COVID money?

01-01:19:14

Felton: Yeah, and we got—oh boy, now my memory is short. I think it's was \$170,000, and we met all the criteria and didn't have to pay it back.

01-01:19:25

Farrell: Oh, that's great.

01-01:19:27

Felton: That was a good thing. But we had a lot of discussion on the board, a pretty heated discussion whether we should take the money or not and we should do

this. Some of the board members felt it was better for other people whether to apply for that money but when you—

01-01:19:47

Farrell: Oh, sorry, go ahead, go ahead.

01-01:19:49

Felton: So anyway, the overall, we decided to go for it and pay off. I think it really helped us get, I think, a running start during COVID. We didn't know what was going to happen. We didn't know if people were going to not have any money to give, and things have turned out, people had more money to give then because they weren't spending it on trips to Europe or whatever, well, people's—or fancy dinners—during COVID. But we didn't know in the beginning what was going to happen, so I thought it was a good idea to cover ourselves.

01-01:20:26

Farrell: Yeah, and that dovetails with your time as board presidency. I know that you took over when the pandemic started, but there was a period before that where you were approached, and you mentioned this earlier, where there was an interest in you stepping in as board president, but you weren't quite ready so Malcolm Sproul came back after Scott Hein had stepped down. Malcolm Sproul came in as the interim president for a year and then you came in. Can you tell me a little bit about those early conversations and about you taking over the board presidency and where you were and what your thinking was at the time?

01-01:21:07

Felton: Okay, that's a good question. Well, the best part was I knew I'd be working with Ted Clement, and I knew that would be a good interaction, that we could work together very well so that was a good thing. I'm just worried pretty much about the time commitment, the number of meetings. As the president, then you are on the executive committee, you're on the governance committee. I was still hanging around the development committee making sure that was going okay, then we had all our board meetings and a lot of meetings. Zoom actually turned out to be good for that because it's just so much less time spent traveling. I mean I'm only twenty minutes from the office unless traffic is terrible but normally twenty minutes, so it's not too bad for me. But Zoom just makes everything a little bit less time heavy. I was worried about that primarily. I wasn't worried so much about the duty.

01-01:22:11

Going back to my professional career, as I became a deputy associate director at Livermore and associate director at Davis, I dealt with lots of meetings with lots of people. I was on dozens of NIH committees where I'd have to fly back to Washington, some of them I was the chairperson. I learned how to deal with committees, and I had a reputation for being fairly no-nonsense, getting the committee work done, and that was appreciated by a lot of people back in

Washington. I wasn't afraid of the duties, and I was really committed to what we're trying to do and then working with Ted made it so much easier. It wasn't a problem. I was just worried about the time sink that would show up.

01-01:23:10

Farrell:

What were some of the things that you learned from Scott and also Malcolm before you stepped into the president's role?

01-01:23:17

Felton:

Very good question. They're both different and they're different personalities. Scott listened very well. Malcolm didn't tend to listen quite as well as Scott, and he would voice his opinion. I learned that to be quiet and listen to what everybody is trying to say and then step in at the right time and try to get a consensus from the group. I think Scott does that very well, and he's fairly quiet. But both those guys had tremendous talents to share and probably much more than I do at Save Mount Diablo. Scott is a world-class photographer, I mean a wildlife photographer, he's just incredible. As I said, Malcolm knew the actual wildlife that I had seen probably four years ago. I knew of birds, I'd go bird-watching now and then, but Malcolm is serious and good, so I learned from them.

01-01:24:27

Farrell:

Aside from development, and land acquisitions or the development making the land acquisitions work, what are some of the goals or the priorities of the board?

01-01:24:42

Felton:

Oh, that's a good question. Well, one thing we've had to go over since I had been the president and really solidified is how big of geographical expanse are we really going to try to conserve. Mount Diablo is what we've been concentrating on for all these forty years or more, but there's a whole range of mountains from Mount Diablo south all the way to San Luis Obispo called the Diablo Range. We've had to decide should we be concerned, maybe not buying properties in the south, but just what's happening in these properties. Are other nonprofits doing their due diligence with these properties? Because the whole range is connected, everything. If you think about whether it's pumas or falcons or, whatever, badgers, they need this whole range, they don't just need Mount Diablo. I think that was a major thing, and we did come to the conclusion that we are committed, that we really were concerned about more than the Mount Diablo Range at least probably into Alameda County and maybe further south as well. And since I have been the president, I've taken a couple of tours, some big properties in the southern part of Diablo Range, it's gorgeous. Some of them have been burned of course but beautiful pieces of property.

01-01:26:17

Farrell:

What do you think the value is to having different perspectives that make up the board? Like Malcolm may know a lot about the flora and fauna and you

might have you get things done, someone might understand how to negotiate with other land trust. What's the value of having diversity on the board?

01-01:26:38

Felton:

Very good point. One of the things we've been doing since I took over is try to increase the diversity of our board. I think that's really critical not just ethnic diversity but geographical diversity. If we're going to have people from Antioch and Pittsburg involved in what we're trying to do, we need to have people from that community on the board. We have done some of that. We have a new young educator, so he's in there because he's an educator. He's also Asian background, and he's from either Pittsburg or Antioch. We're trying to develop a more diversified board. We now have I think—I might be wrong—six women in the board. We'd love to have even more, but at one point, there was only one or two women, so we've done better that way. Of course, I would love to get more young people. Typically board membership is people that are retired or near retirement like me, and you'd love to have the perspective of younger people, but they're working and it's harder. We have a young member named Jeff Stone who's an actual builder, but he's been very, very active in trying to recruit money and people involved, and he's quite a bit younger than most of our members. We have three or four people under fifty but not too many unfortunately.

01-01:28:17

Farrell:

There are different development opportunity, the programs, and I know one of them is Forever Wild, and I'm wondering how much the board is involved with the Forever Wild Campaign?

01-01:28:31

Felton:

Well quite a bit. Of course, that has been going on for years, started way before Ted came, and we've tried to use the money in different ways. One is for acquisition of property, which we just finished this huge acquisition of this Concord Mt. Diablo Trail Ride Association, conservation easement on top of Mount Diablo. We used that money from Forever Wild to purchase that easement, which is over a million dollars, and it prevents them from then developing the property. We don't own it, but we've stopped development of it because they would sell off little acre pieces to keep their budget going over the years, and we didn't want that to continue.

01-01:29:24

The other thing though—oh, I forgot what I was going to say, I'm really sorry.

01-01:29:39

Farrell:

That's okay, that's okay, maybe it'll come back to you.

01-01:29:43

Felton:

But—

01-01:29:44

Farrell:

Oh, go ahead.

01-01:29:45

Felton:

But the question was about Forever Wild. The other thing is we really needed—and this was something I was working on before I was even on the development committee, I was just doing stewardship—was we needed to make the stewardship more sustainable, to have money to do the projects, money to hire somebody if we needed to build a fence or something. What Forever Wild has done is some of that money has gone to more of an endowment so that we have money coming in to help pay Sean's salary, to help pay for projects every single year. Forever Wild has gone to two different directions, it's gone one for land acquisition, and in stewardship for sustaining what we're doing. That's what I wanted to tell you.

01-01:30:41

Farrell:

Yeah, and that's important too. I think those components of especially a nonprofit are that you have to have those different income—you have to have donations into different areas to make the whole thing work, yeah.

01-01:30:55

Felton:

Exactly, and of course, the contributions to Save Mount Diablo's Forever Wild had been—some people, it's been large numbers of dollars, some people, it's been small numbers, but it's all gotten I think very well used. Some people gave ten dollars, twenty dollars, that's okay. We've been very fortunate to have some really large donors who really helped us out and closed deals on certain purchases, helped with Forever Wild. It's amazing what people do.

01-01:31:34

Farrell:

Yeah, and you took over at such a unique time, part of the COVID pandemic. What was it like for you to run the board during the pandemic?

01-01:31:44

Felton:

I know. Well luckily, I had been on the board for a number of years, so I knew, but it was hard. Luckily, I had been dealing with Zoom. I was teaching a course. I don't know if you're familiar being on the Berkeley campus with this technique called CRISPR that was developed at Berkeley? Well, I happen to be teaching a course on CRISPR to Cal State's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute to older people and so it was in-person down in Pleasanton at a retirement community, about forty people. And then all of a sudden, it just shut down like that in March I guess and so I had half a class that I still needed to teach, so I had to really learn how to use Zoom and all the different techniques with Zoom. My wife had been doing Zoom with all these nonprofits that she was involved in and so I was very familiar with it. But another nice thing is I don't have to do the technical Zoom part. We have Joanne McCluhan, who works for Ted and handles all that. I think the meetings have gone really pretty well, it's amazing. I was worried, I was more worried of course of the unknown from COVID.

01-01:33:05

Farrell:

Yeah. Were you able to keep having regular meetings? Did you have more, did you have less, did you have the same amount?

01-01:33:11

Felton:

The same. Our Save Mount Diablo board meeting is about ten times a year. It's usually the first Wednesday of the month, so we would just continue to have the meetings at the same time. But then all the other committees whether it was the governance, the executive committee, development committee, land committee, finance committee, all had to go to Zoom as well. If I wanted to be part of any of those committees, I had to be on more Zoom conversations.

01-01:33:48

Farrell:

Given that everything was so uncertain during that period of time, what were some of the conversations that the board was having then?

01-01:33:56

Felton:

Well, as I mentioned before, I think the most important was should we apply for government money to help. We didn't know what to expect, we didn't even know people will be giving, so I thought it was a great idea, and we argued about this a lot. One of the major things we had to do there, we had to make clear what we were doing with this trail ride association, conserve property on Mount Diablo, so we discussed that quite a bit. We spent a lot of time on Zoom talking about what level of political involvement we should get in, in some of these developments. Seth Adams and his group were very much involved in this Measure T, which was out in Antioch. It was called Let the People Decide, but it was designed really to have the people have to vote if they're going to put in a big development. I don't know if you've been to Antioch in recent years, but there's a big Kaiser Hospital there, and across the street from that was all this undeveloped land that the developers wanted to develop. Of course, one of the biggest problems in Antioch, it's overdeveloped that the traffic coming into the Bay Area into Berkeley, into Oakland, it's just a parking lot in the mornings. People there really don't want anybody else out there. Anyway, we got really involved in that and joined the political action group to get this Measure T passed. Seth's really good at that kind of stuff. We had a few other measures that didn't do quite as well. We've gotten more politically involved. I guess we hadn't talked about this.

01-01:35:58

Farrell:

When did that start to change? Was that specifically during COVID?

01-01:36:03

Felton:

No, I think it was actually before, in the couple of years before, we got more involved politically. There was a big thing here right at my front door it's called Magee Ranch, which is in Danville, and it's a cattle ranch out Diablo Road. The city wanted to make it into a park and have it connect to Sycamore Regional Park, which is in San Ramon, so it would be a whole expanse of land that you could hike and bike through and take your horse and then would allow you to connect to Mount Diablo more from the south. But there were a number of homeowners right there at that ranch that said, "No way," and there was a big fight, came down to a big vote. Save Mount Diablo led hikes on

Magee Ranch to inform people of what we were really voting for or against. We played a major role there, and that was just as COVID started.

01-01:37:13

Farrell:

Also given where the board's been, at the start of the pandemic to where things are now, what are your visions for the future of Save Mount Diablo?

01-01:37:28

Felton:

Well, that's a real good question. As I said, the whole idea of thinking about the Diablo Range as part of something we should pay attention to. Whether we actually buy properties outside Contra Costa County, we haven't really discussed, but at least we can try to influence decisions that are made about properties in the Diablo Range and understand them and know it's there. There's a big attempt to build a dam in Del Puerto Canyon I think it's called. It's outside south of Tracy. I forget the name of the town, Patterson, California. The impact of that dam on the community, wildlife community and the whole thing, we're involved in that at least giving our support to prevention.

01-01:38:29

See a lot of what I've learned, a lot of my learning as the chair is Save Mount Diablo puts their name out there and says, "We're supporting x" means something to certain political groups, and I hadn't really thought about it so much. We have to be real careful of what we support and what we don't. We don't want to be the enemy of every developer, but we want the right development, and we want it done properly. That's a big thing and that's one of my learning experience. I had no idea that our support or lack of has political consequences, and people respect us.

01-01:39:24

Farrell:

Are you thinking about climate change at all?

01-01:39:27

Felton:

Oh, yes. I'm glad you brought that up. This is something we've been talking about. Actually, Ted has implemented climate change into a lot of his objectives for the staff and for the organization—everything from how often would it be advisable to commute and not commute and how much carbon dioxide is put into the atmosphere. We talk about plants and in different types of just plantings on our properties, and there are certain trees that might be better in sequestering carbon dioxide. Yeah, it's integrated in almost every thing now where three years ago it wasn't. We have added that as one of our objectives.

01-01:40:28

Farrell:

Also, given that you have a real interest in bringing people to the organization, as president of board, are you thinking about who Save Mount Diablo's audience is and maybe bringing in younger people that keep these efforts up over time? Or how are you thinking about that?

01-01:40:48

Felton:

Yeah, no, it's absolutely a good thing to worry about. Most of the support comes from either Concord, Walnut Creek, Danville, San Ramon, Orinda, Walnut Creek, maybe Lafayette, those areas. Where people are wealthier, but they're also older, and we'd love to get more involvement from Brentwood, Antioch, Pittsburg, Bay Point, and West Contra Costa. The people are younger, they tend to be some more ethnically diverse, and we'd love them to get involved. That's, what's part of the program we haven't really talked about is bringing education into things, and a lot of the education work we've been doing is not necessarily going into the Danville schools or the Orinda schools where the kids are well informed or at least a lot of them are. We want to get more involved in Antioch and Pittsburg. That's where our new board member, Achilles. He's a teacher in Antioch I think or Pittsburg, and gets his students more aware of what it means to care about nature and care about the environment, and here it is right in your backyard. I think we're going in that direction.

01-01:42:15

Of course, you might have heard, we're building an educational preserve right next to Cal State East Bay there, I think it is on our property Mangini. We're putting in an area that's going to make it more conducive for students to sit around, and we will have other people use it, like church groups. That's something that's brand-new in the last couple of years as well. Even though I've been chair a lot has been happening, and it's been during COVID and during Zoom time so yeah.

01-01:42:56

Farrell:

Yeah, it's still been productive, absolutely. One thing that we've been touching on throughout but haven't explicitly talked about is Save Mount Diablo leadership. I'm wondering if you could tell me a little bit about—Seth Adams is the longest running employee—what he brings to the organization, what some of his strengths are, and maybe what his leadership style is like?

01-01:43:23

Felton:

A great question. Well, Seth is a very knowledgeable biologist and really knows his plants and animals for this area. But he's also a real expert in land use and so he's really the engine behind what lands do we need to preserve, what lands do we don't need to worry about, what developers want to do. He's very involved in the big—I don't know how familiar you are with—there's as naval weapons depot that's out in Concord, and it got given to the city of Concord. The regional park have put in a couple of hundred-acre park already there, but developers want the high ground, they want the ridges. Seth is thinking, this is going to just ruin the ambience of the whole thing and so he was trying to not say don't develop but cut it back, cut back from the edge of the cliff, cut back the number of homes, maybe add some open space to your developments and things like that. That's real expertise. He is just so knowledgeable about development and who the people are, he knows them. Some of them hate his guts because he's been doing this for a long time,



probably has a target on his back from some developers who he's never gotten along with, but most people haven't. That's a long story, I won't get into their method of developing.

01-01:45:00

But Seth is just so valuable and then he has all the history, and one person that's picked up on his history is John Gallagher. He gives actual talks on the history of Mount Diablo, Save Mount Diablo. He was one of the guys that helped restore the beacon as well, so he's just a major, major contributor to everything. But Seth, as a leader, he is not the kind of person that probably want to lead a group. He tends to want to do it his way, but he's very, very good at what he does, so I think he's in a great position. A person like Ted just really, really experienced, really listens to everybody, knows how to fit in at the national level, fit in at the local level, and he's just done a great job.

01-01:46:02

Farrell:

Yeah, and I'm curious about that too. Given with the executive director leadership, I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about what some of the differences between leadership style between Ron Brown was and Ted Clement when he took over recently?

01-01:46:21

Felton:

Yeah, that's good point. I think Ron Brown was more laidback; Ted was more aggressive. Ted is definitely more involved in national land conservation. He wants to make sure that Save Mount Diablo meets all the criteria for National Land Trust accreditation. There's a certification from the national land conservation organization that very few land trusts have. Ted has insisted that we spend time and effort to be a nationally certified land conservation group. That wasn't something that was on Ron's platform. What else are differences? Ted is a little better I think at talking to people about our mission and then getting them to contribute. He's just a very good fundraiser. I mean Ron knows his outdoors and conservation, but Ted just brings another whole element to it I think. Yeah, and it's hard to compare the two, different styles completely.

01-01:47:49

Farrell:

Yeah. Is there anyone else that you want to highlight in terms of leadership or significant staff contributions or volunteer contributions?

01-01:48:00

Felton:

We've talked about Seth, and we talked about Joanne McCluhan, that's always behind the scenes, Monica Oei, the person that keeps the books. I don't even know her exact title, and she's accountant, controller, but Monica is very good at keeping the books. She helps out the development person with the books. Karen is more of a big picture person, she isn't a detail person. People like dealing with Karen as the head of development effort. She has a great person, Margie Ryan, working with her hired during COVID, and Margie had worked for other nonprofits. But Karen's just extremely good.

01-01:49:28

Burt Bassler has been the head of our finance committee, volunteer head of for many, many years, way before I got involved, and he's really good. He's a detail guy. Between he and Monica, we have good people dealing with the finance side. Now, Ron Brown wasn't so careful, and there were times back before Ted showed up where the organization had some real financial difficulties. With Monica and Ted and Burt, we have really good people watching out for our finances. Ted was really good during COVID. He just said, "Hey, guys, we don't know what's going to happen, we're cutting backing in all these different areas. We're not cutting your salary, but we're cutting expenses." He just really jumped on that and did a good job of cutting back expenses of all different kinds. I think the finance people really deserve a lot of credit.

01-01:50:38

Farrell:

Yeah, that's great. I do want to ask you some reflective questions, but before we do that, are there any topics or things that we haven't talked about that you want to make sure to mention?

01-01:50:49

Felton:

Well, we've done a good job looking at the organization. As I said, I think the future is going to look different. We're going to get more involved in the Diablo Range, we're going to get more involved in education, we're going to continue to be involved in some of the land use issues in our geographical area. Those would probably be the things that will take a lot of our effort and then keep the stewardship of the properties we do own. You have to understand, we didn't talk about this, but when I first started with the organization, the whole way things worked was Save Mount Diablo would buy a piece of property, fix it up, take the barbed wire out, get rid of the junk, and then the state park would buy it. Well, the state park didn't have any money, so Save Mount Diablo has a lot more properties than they used to and so we have to steward all those properties. It will be great at some point where—well the regional parks have bought properties from us, and they've done a great job. But the state park would be great if they would—especially the ones right adjacent to the park, so that would allow us to just expand the size of Mount Diablo State Park. And Ted's been very good. He's met with the head of the state parks and talked to them about how we can work together better. That's what I see happening in the future.

01-01:52:17

I would love to see like Curry Canyon Ranch, which is over a thousand acres, a lot of it be acquired by the state park because there's a major trail that comes along the whole ridge from Curry Point, which is part of the main road going in all the way south that is—Save Mount Diablo actually has that property and we'd love—oh, this is another thing we haven't talked about. But we'd love that property to be available to the public, so they could walk all the way along the ridge. When they get on the trail and there's a big sign that says, No Trespassing, it turns people off. Some people jump the fence anyway because

it gets them to the other side. But we'd love to open that up to the public, and then how we do it, we've discussed this numerous times with the board over and over again, well, how do you open up land to the public? Take on the liability, do you allow mountain bikers, do you allow horses, do you allow just hikers, and what does that look like? We need people then to patrol land that we open to the public? All that is coming up in the future, but it would be great if we could give the state half of Curry Ranch, let's say, because it's right in the middle of the state park.

01-01:53:48

Farrell:

Yeah, hopefully, that will be a direction to move into in the future. I do want to ask you a couple of reflective questions, and the first one is what has it meant to you to be involved with Save Mount Diablo?

01-01:54:01

Felton:

Well, that's a good question. It's meant to me, just I think, one major thing is that I'm trying to do my best for our community and for the future generations. This land use, it's not necessarily my problem in my lifetime, it's my kid's problem and their kid's problem, and are we going to have places that people want to go and be outdoors and enjoy the wilderness right here in the Bay Area. I figure I'm doing my contribution to that, best I can.

01-01:54:37

Farrell:

Given that the environment and open space and being in nature has played such a significant role in your life, what has it meant to you to be engaged in the environment in the myriad of ways that you've been throughout time?

01-01:54:57

Felton:

Well, it's pretty much like I said. I just think it's the place where we really learn how to enjoy nature and to find out what nature is all about by going out in the environment. That's part of my goal is to just help the future generations do the same thing. I think that's our whole educational program, and I'm not directly involved in, but Ted and Robert Phelps, who we haven't talked about, who's our new chair of our education and the person that took my wife's job at Cal State East Bay. He's involved, and he's got Native American relatives too, so he really involved from that point of view as well. But I think all these things just help us appreciate where we live and not to destroy it. If we're going to develop, we better think about how we're going to do it, carefully.

01-01:56:12

Farrell:

Yeah, and so we did talk little bit about your hopes for the future of the organization, and so my last question for you would be, what do you feel that Mount Diablo and Save Mount Diablo add to quality of life in the Bay Area? How do you think it impacts that, and how do you hope that continues?

01-01:56:33

Felton:

Well, as Ted will tell you—he's more of a student of this than I am, but there's been a lot of publications lately about what wilderness, outdoors, and getting out away from your electronic toys and phones and just out of the city does

for people's mental and physical health. To have these opportunities to go out and hike on a trail, run on a trail, bicycle on a trail within a short distance from your house, it's just fantastic. There's not that many places in the US where you can do that near a big metropolitan area. We're so fortunate in the Bay Area, I mean we're not just talking Save Mount Diablo, but we have the hills behind the Berkeley campus, we have Marin County, we have the hills down the peninsula, so, and the shoreline trails. The Bay Area has been just way ahead of its time in trying to say, yes, the outdoors, the wilderness is important for our psychological makeup, and you just can't spend all your life indoors. That's what it means to me, and I think that's what the future is too.

01-01:57:58

I know you heard this before, but when the state park was originally set up, I think it was 6000-plus acres of land. Over the years, partly due to Save Mount Diablo, probably due to regional parks, probably from other groups, there's well over 120,000 acres now set aside, so we've done a good job over time trying to improve these lands for the future. Because three generations from now, they aren't going to know who I am, they aren't going to know who you are; hopefully, they'll still be out there enjoying the land.

01-01:58:42

Farrell:

Yeah, yeah. The work has been really incredible, and, yeah, part of what makes the Bay Area special. Well, thank you so much for all of your time today, all of your thoughtful responses, for sharing your stories. I really appreciate it, and it's been a real pleasure to speak with you, so thank you for your time.

01-01:59:04

Felton:

Well, I got to say thank you to you. You really prepared very well for this two-hour conversation, so hats off to you, thank you.

[End of Interview]