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## **Balboa Park Conservancy Launches Two New Volunteer Programs with National Support**

The [Balboa Park Conservancy](#), the nonprofit public-private partnership that cares for Balboa Park, is going all in on volunteer recruitment, training and retention with two important new programs launched this year.

The Conservancy's robust park-wide volunteer program provides many different ways to get involved and help the park, from interacting with visitors to planting and caring for trees. In 2018 they made an even stronger commitment to the improvement, maintenance, and future of Balboa Park by launching the Park Ambassadors and Tree Stewards programs.

"Our commitment to best practices in volunteer stewardship is reflected in our recognition by the Points of Light Foundation as a Certified Service Enterprise," says CEO Tomas Herrera-Mishler. "We are building on the strong base established by our volunteer corps in the Balboa Park Visitor Center. Our growing partnership with the City of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department is well expressed in the Park Ambassador program which has already trained and launched its first cadre of volunteers. We are also very proud of the Tree Stewards volunteer program which also launched this fall and is attracting passionate tree folks to help us steward the many new trees we are planting throughout the park with support from a major grant from Cal Fire. We are especially grateful to San Diego Jewish Family Services for appointing Audrey Tomayo an Americorps VIP Fellow to serve as our volunteer coordinator, and to Connie Matsui and Bill Beckman for providing the critical matching funds for that award."

### **PARK AMBASSADORS**

The Balboa Park Conservancy partners with the City of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department to welcome and inform park visitors through the new, all-volunteer Park Ambassador program. Park Ambassadors greet visitors, give directions, provide current information on park history, attractions and events, and answer other park-related questions. Ambassadors are briefed daily about any special events in the park, and about any attraction closures or traffic issues.

Balboa Park Ambassadors are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the park. They work in teams of two, positioned outdoors in three major plazas in the historic center of the park, where they also act as extra eyes and ears of the City of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department, alerting park staff to maintenance needs and safety issues when they arise. Volunteers complete 20 hours of orientation



training and go through a background check and fingerprinting. They are asked to work four 4-hour shifts per month and make a time commitment of at least one year.

### TREE STEWARDS

The Balboa Park Conservancy partners with Tree San Diego to monitor Balboa Park trees through its new volunteer Balboa Park Tree Stewards program. Balboa Park's collection of more than 15,000 trees is an extraordinary asset; however, caring for them properly requires dedicated support from the community. Tree Stewards are specially trained to monitor newly planted trees, general health conditions of existing trees, soil moisture surrounding new trees, including identifying irrigation needs, and possible pest infestation.

With the Conservancy's recently completed comprehensive and detailed Tree Inventory as an invaluable tool, Tree Stewards bring the collected data to life and learn how to identify trees, proper planting techniques, irrigation and watering of new and established trees, and general tree maintenance issues. After completing 20 hours of orientation training and a background check and fingerprinting, they work in teams of two in assigned zones, around 6 to 8 hours each month in 2- to 4-hour shifts, for a minimum one-year commitment. Their work is crucial to the present and future health of the park.

### AmeriCorps Fellow

In recognition of the Conservancy's mission and its record of excellence, the national service organization AmeriCorps, through its Volunteer Infrastructure Project, recently assigned Audrey Tamayo to the Conservancy to lead efforts to recruit, train, and retain new volunteers. Volunteer Infrastructure Project (VIPSESE) Fellows are AmeriCorps members who build and strengthen sustainable volunteer programs in existing service organizations, leaving a legacy in the communities they serve by building lasting systems of volunteer engagement and management. Each VIPSESE Fellow dedicates their service to a single Partner Site, working behind the scenes of service to enable volunteers to take part in meaningful service positions that meet community needs. In order to qualify for a VIPSESE Fellow, the Conservancy showed that it already had a robust program in place, a clear plan to move forward, and the infrastructure to support the Fellow's activities.

"I'm delighted to be working with such a dynamic and dedicated organization," said Audrey Tamayo. "The response we've already had to the Tree Stewards and Park Ambassadors programs since my arrival has been tremendous. Combining these new volunteers' energy and enthusiasm with the Conservancy's knowledge, experience and resources will make the visitor experience so much better."

As a fellow rather than an employee, Audrey Tamayo operates at no cost to San Diego taxpayers; her fellowship is underwritten by Jewish Family Services of San Diego. A space in the historic House of Hospitality has been renovated for her use in training volunteers. This remarkable collaboration between the Conservancy, AmeriCorps, Jewish Family Services, and the City of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department has already resulted in more than 50 new Tree Stewards coming on board since September 2018.



The Conservancy is actively recruiting volunteers for these new programs, as well as for shifts in the Balboa Park Visitors Center and other assignments. Volunteers have a unique opportunity to meet and share their enjoyment of the Park with visitors and fellow volunteers. Anyone interested should email [visitor@balboapark.org](mailto:visitor@balboapark.org) for a volunteer application or call 619-331-1920.

The Balboa Park Conservancy parkwide volunteer initiative has been generously supported by: The Art Pratt Foundation of Old Mission Rotary, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), The David. C. Copley Foundation, The County of San Diego, and the City of San Diego.

*The Balboa Park Conservancy provides expertise, advocacy, and resources to envision, enhance, and sustain Balboa Park for all visitors in partnership with the City of San Diego and in collaboration with other organizations in the Park and the community.*

A national [Points of Light](http://www.points-of-light.org) Service Enterprise  
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