

## San Jose resident Larry Ames named environmentalist of the year

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Posted: 09/29/2011 08:03:02 PM PDT



Photo by John Medina for SVCN San Jose resident Larry Ames, recognized as the 'Environmentalist of the Year' by the County League of Conservation Voters, is seen here on the Los Gatos Creek Trail on September 16, 2011 in San Jose, California. Ames was a leader in getting the Willow Glen portion of the trail approved over 15 years ago. ( John Medina )

Thanks to Larry Ames, the Willow Glen area has one of the most active and effective neighborhood email lists in existence, where participants debate such issues as the merits of cast iron cookware, share news of suspicious activities and offer free items and endless advice to one another.

Thanks to Ames, the Willow Glen Neighborhood Association became a force to be reckoned with by developers and city hall, which is why the Buffington House remains on Lincoln Avenue and is now a city landmark.

Thanks to Ames, there are miles of bikes and hiking trails in the community with more to come. He served on the Guadalupe River Park Task Force, on the Santa Clara County Parks Commission for 10 years and has been a key player in the creation of the Three Creeks Trail.

Now Ames is getting a very formal thank you for his many years of community involvement and activism on Oct. 5.

The Santa Clara County League of Conservation Voters is giving Ames its environmentalist of the year award at its annual fundraising event in Monte Sereno.

"Larry is one of those remarkable, high-performing individuals who is also self-effacing," says Rod Diridon, president of the league's board.

"He has done remarkable things, especially community things like the trails programs, tree plantings and the neighborhood association program in Willow Glen. He shuns publicity, but those who work with him realize what a remarkable leader he is and what a good heart he has. It was those people who encouraged his selection."

Of the award, Ames says, "I am very honored. It's a wonderful award and it's a good group."

Ames and his wife, Liv, came to California in 1979 so he could accept a job at Lockheed Martin, where today he is senior staff physicist.

"We are in the house we bought within two weeks of finding San Jose as a dot on the map," Ames says. "We found our house in Willow Glen and fell in love with the place."

They still reside in the home where they raised their three sons.

Ames says the reason he's gotten so involved with the community is simple: "Enlightened self interest. I'm working to make my area good because I want it to be good for me, and it works out to be good for everybody at the same time," he says.

"I got involved because I wanted a bike path for my sons. I worked on the Los Gatos Creek Trail so it would be finished by the time they were on training wheels, and that's what started me."

While some community activists have an adversary relationship with city and county bureaucrats, Ames considers them allies.

"City planners are people that have the best wishes of the community. You want to work with them and find out the problems and work together and solve them," he says.

"They're trying to do good things for the area. If you go in with that mindset and try and work with them, you can do good things."

Ames also has a high tolerance for long meetings.

"Meetings can drag on, but you realize they're interesting people to talk with and you meet new friends that way," he says.

"By going to trail meetings, I learned about other places to go and sights to see. It's a lot more fun to talk about trails than watching a rerun of a sitcom on television."

For all he's done for the community, Willow Glen residents are particularly grateful to Ames for establishing a neighborhood email list in April 1999.

It was inspired by the Campus Community Association eList in the Naglee Park area north of San Jose State University.

Willow Glen started with seven subscribers and by its 10th anniversary it had grown to more than 1,200 subscribers.

In 2010, following disagreements over postings on the eList, which carried the WGNA name in its URL, Ames launched a new eList--The Willow Glen Backfence, [www.wg.backfence.net](http://www.wg.backfence.net). It is now the de facto eList for the community.

Ames has served as the eList moderator from the beginning, but with the launch of Backfence, he started posting his personal thoughts under the observations tab.

In 1999, Mercury News columnist Joe Rodriguez wrote, "If only we could clone a Larry Ames ... ."

In a 2006 Willow Glen Resident article on Willow Glen Neighborhood Association, past president John Gibbs said of Ames, "He does 90 percent of the work that no one's thanked for. He really is the heart and soul of the organization."

Diridon, who says he met Ames more than 30 years ago at a tree planting on the bank of Los Gatos Creek, says, "Larry had gone out of his way to bring other people into leadership responsibilities in the environmental and home owner association movements. While some scramble to promote themselves, he scrambles to replicate himself by bringing in other leaders."

Ames will be presented the award at the 18th annual environmental awards and fundraising event, Oct. 5 from 5:30 to 7 p.m. at the home of Carl and Leslee Guardino, 16060 Rose Ave., Monte Sereno. Also receiving awards are Dianne McKenna for lifetime achievement and Weston Miles Architects for green business of the year. Tickets are \$50.

For more information or reservations, call 408.535.8656.

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