

MARIN COUNTY PARKS

# 'LIFE-CHANGING' FUNDS

## Grants aim to increase equity in access to outdoors



PHOTO BY JOHN D. NELSON

Laurel Newmark participates in a Bridging Generations outing organized by Love is the Answer, or LITA, at McNears Beach in San Rafael this spring. The program paired older residents with third-graders from Brandeis Marin.

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Enjoying the outdoors with others is good for seniors, but access can be a challenge, says Jessica Williams, executive director of the San Rafael nonprofit LITA, or Love is the Answer.

Thanks to the Breathe/Respira community grant program, seniors working with the nonprofit can enjoy activities at the park, she said.

"We are thrilled to be part of the program," said Williams, whose organization used a previous \$4,000 grant to offer special outings to McNears Beach Park in San Rafael, pairing adults from a senior living complex in San Rafael with third-graders from Brandeis Marin school.

"It has been really wonderful and transformative,

a way to get everybody out together, experience nature, reduce stress and increase their well-being," she said. "Now that we've done it once, we have seen how thrilled everybody was and how much fun they had. We feel compelled to make sure it happens again."

LITA is among 14 organizations to benefit from a new round of grants this year worth a combined \$190,000 from the county parks department to provide better access to parks and open space preserves. The Board of Supervisors approved the funding last week.

The grant program was established six years ago to overcome such obstacles as the cost of accessible transportation, said Kevin Wright, manager of government and external affairs for the parks department.

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PHOTO BY JOHN D. NELSON

Nova Hairston, a county park ranger, speaks to residents and students at the event. The participants learned about flora and fauna, decorated flower pots and had a picnic at the park.

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— Kevin Wright, Marin County Parks

# Grants

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He said the department and the open space district “want our lands and programs to serve every resident, be accessible to every resident, and we want every resident to feel welcome when they visit the places and participate in the programs we provide.”

With that in mind, the parks department reduced parking fees by half at McNears Beach Park, Stafford Lake Park in Novato and Paradise Beach Park on the Tiburon peninsula. All fees are waived at the McNears swimming pool.

“Partnering with Marin’s community organizations involved in important social equity and environmental work is a necessary component of serving Marin’s communities,” Wright said. “We believe we can do more together and want to support what is working in our community.”

Over the past six years, the county has authorized more than \$730,800 to support programs like this.



PHOTO BY JOHN D. NELSON

Adele Baratz, right, takes part in a Bridging Generations outing this spring at McNears Beach in San Rafael. The event was organized by the nonprofit LITA, or Love is the Answer.

The program is funded by Measure A, the parks tax approved in 2012.

This year, the Marin City Community Services District, the San Geronimo Valley Community Center and Bay Area Community Resources/Slide Ranch each will receive \$30,000 for various programs that boost social equity and di-

versity. Marin Community Clinics, North Marin Community Services, Tomales Bay Youth Center/West Marin Community Services and Innovative Health Solutions/Healthy Cooking with Kids are to receive grants of more than \$10,000 apiece. LITA received \$5,125.

“These grants nearly

double our capacity to provide programs to local residents across the county,” said Max Korten, said director of Marin County Parks. “These trips overcome barriers to reaching the park and help residents build long-term relationships, so they return over and over. It can be life-changing.”