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For many people, moving to a new community can be challenging, and for that community to be considered their new “hometown” can take quite some time. The process of making new friends, getting to know the area, learning its history, and finding fulfilling ways to become involved in a new community can often take years.

When Diane and Jerry Pozo moved to Petaluma from the Foothills of the Sierras in 2017, they *quickly* found themselves feeling connected to the community. Married for 30 years, Diane Pozo has an M.S. in Counseling and was a school counselor with the Hayward United School District, in addition to working with a number of non-profits over the years, and Jerry Pozo worked in the construction industry, primarily as a technical and specifications consultant.

“As soon as we moved to Petaluma it felt like home to us,” said Jerry. “We became very involved in the community from the very beginning.”

As an example, Jerry shared that he has worked with the Petaluma Historic Library and Museum, where he has portrayed Petalumans of Yesteryear, has volunteered at the Petaluma Visitors Center, and has worked as a California State Park Volunteer Docent at three different parks.

One great interest that the Pozos enjoyed during their 12 years living in the Foothills was their participation in a birding group. Both Diane and Jerry had grown up in the Bay Area, and were more familiar with the coastal birds than the birds they encountered more inland.

“We enjoyed going for walks with our group there and learning the various birds,” said Jerry.

When the time came for them to move back to the Bay Area to be near family, they were drawn to Petaluma because they had heard so many great things about the community, and they knew of the many birds who visited the Alman Marsh adjoining Shollenberger Park.

Jerry remembers being drawn by a picture that he saw that stood out to him.

“I recall seeing a photograph by photographer Scott Hess,” he said, “that was taken of geese flying over the wetlands at Shollenberger Park.”

Because of that, the park was one of the first places the Pozos visited, and they fell in love with it immediately. Reflecting on what the park means to them, with its unique wetlands and hundreds of different birds that are drawn there, Jerry said, “We have enjoyed walking the path in Shollenberger Park and reacquainting ourselves with sea birds.”

This place of sanctuary for the Pozo’s became even more significant over the last year. In December of 2019, Diane was diagnosed with stage four cancer.

“We were shocked,” said Jerry, “but wanted to continue our relationship with walking, birds and the coastal community.”

While visiting Shollenberger the following month, at the beginning of 2020, they began talking about the many benches around the park and along the trail, many with plaques

indicating those who had commissioned them or others being honored and memorialized by the placement of the bench. As they talked more about it, Jerry remembers thinking, “It would be a great idea to place a bench there for Diane, ourselves and others.”

By adding another bench to those already installed at Shollenberger, Jerry and Diane thought, it would provide a place that could benefit many others in the years to come. It would be, said Jerry, “A place to sit and rest while enjoying the wetlands of Petaluma, and in view of our ponds and river.”

In late January of 2020, the Pozo’s filed the paperwork to install such a bench with the Public Works and Parks and Recreation Departments. After some conversation between city leadership and themselves around the specifics, a decision was finally made about the bench and the plaque.

“We really wanted to make a choice that would provide a place for people to sit well into the future, Jerry explained, “while not requiring regular maintenance. We ended up going with a type of bench that is very durable and has a 50-year warranty.”

But just when things were set and about to move forward, the COVID-19 pandemic arrived. Like so many other things in the last year, the plans were put on hold.

“We have been shut down since,” said Jerry.

The Pozos’ hopes did not fade, however, and finally, in mid-July, Diane and Jerry were able to walk the Shollenberger path — along with leadership of the Parks and Recreation Department — and select the perfect location for their bench. In November of 2020 the Pozo’s received word from the Parks and Recreations department that a qualified contractor had been secured to prepare the area and lay the concrete pad.

“Once this was completed, the city would be able to install the bench and plaque,” Jerry added.

Finally, in mid-December, approaching one year from when they first had the idea, the Pozos were contacted to let them know that the bench and plaque had been installed. Because Diane had chemotherapy that day, they both went out together to see it the next morning, and were very pleased by what they saw.

In imagining the many visitors, walkers and birdwatchers who will wander by each year, Jerry comments, “We hope if you are walking the pathway out in Shollenberger, you will stop and rest a while.”

And, presumably, enjoy the birds around and in front of you, and let your thoughts and imaginations fly free. The plaque at the base extends just such an invitation.

THIS IS MY BENCH.

COME, SIT WITH ME FOR AWHILE AND DREAM.

DIANE AND JERRY POZO