

HOPE RANCH LIVING

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A Social Publication Exclusively
For The Residents of Hope Ranch



Your Hope Ranch Neighbors
celebrate the
Women's Fund of Santa Barbara

Story by Carolyn Jabs
Photos by Michelle Lauren, Michelle Lauren Photography



The Women's Fund Hope Ranch contingent: a partial gathering as there are nearly 45 residents who participate!

meet your neighbors

By **Carolyn Jabs**, Hope Ranch resident Photos by Michelle Lauren, Michelle Lauren Photography



Women's Fund of Santa Barbara

A community of Hope Ranch women who live to give

Generosity characterizes many of the families that live in Hope Ranch. "We know we're fortunate to live here," says Denise Lilly who has lived on Camino Medio for ten years. "And it feels natural to give back." Like many other women in the Ranch, Lilly supports a variety of local nonprofit organizations but she is especially drawn to the Women's Fund, an organization she joined three years ago. "There's a sense of sisterhood because women are coming together to fund important projects in our community. I take pride in being part of that."

The idea for the Women's Fund germinated in 2002 when several local women invited Jacqueline Caster, founder of the Everychild Foundation in Los Angeles, to speak at a Women in Philanthropy program sponsored by the Santa Barbara Foundation. She suggested a simple but engaging philanthropic model: by pooling charitable donations, women could have a bigger impact on the community. "For those of us who were tired of fundraisers, this approach had tremendous appeal," says Melissa Brooks. "We didn't want to spend money to raise money."

In 2004, the Women's Fund became a Field of Interest Fund of the Santa Barbara Foundation with the modest goal of raising \$50,000.

By the end of the year, they had collected almost three times that much. "We knew this was an idea whose time had come!" recalls Founding Chair Carol Palladini. The past fifteen years have proved her right. Membership has grown from 68 women in 2004 to over 1,000 today. Collectively, Women's Fund members have donated more than \$7.2 million



Phyllis Cox and Lynn Wells of the CALM group.



HOPE group Team Captain Linda Lorenzen, Melissa Brooks and Louise LaMothe.

to 102 carefully researched non-profit programs that have impacted nearly 100,000 women, children, and families in Santa Barbara, Goleta and Carpinteria. Even more impressive, the organization is governed and managed by an all-volunteer leadership team.

Unlike other grantmaking organizations, the Women's Fund doesn't accept applications. Every other year, a survey goes to members asking what they regard as the most critical needs for women, children, and families in South Santa Barbara County. A Research Committee of volunteers then combs through a database of over 200 nonprofits to find those that address the needs identified by the membership. In a highly confidential process, researchers visit agencies to discuss programs or projects that might become candidates for a grant of between \$50,000 and \$150,000. To be certain an agency can make good use of such a sizeable grant, researchers conduct an in-depth evaluation of

goals, financial statements, leadership, structure, and sustainability.

After extensive discussion and revision of the applications, the Committee selects about a dozen agencies to be placed on a ballot that goes to the entire Women's Fund membership. "Our research process is unique and rigorous," observes Sarah de Tagyos who has lived on Via Glorieta for 19 years and joined the research committee in 2006. After serving as its co-chair, she went on to assume other leadership roles within the Women's Fund and is on the board today. "The women on the Research Committee are amazing," she says. "They come from varied backgrounds, and they devote ten months to the process. Thanks to their diligence, members know the money they donate will make a difference in our community."

The flexible structure of the groups within the Women's Fund allows them to be highly responsive to the preferences of members. For example,

Susan Rose, who lives on Las Palmas and has been a Women's Fund member for 15 years, is in a group of two that includes her and her close friend, Judy Hopkinson, who lived on Cresta for 16 years before moving downtown. Barbara Cronin, on the other hand, is a member of Ten for Transformation which, despite its name, now has over 20 members and two votes. "Our ballot discussions are interesting because we have teachers, therapists, and social advocates, and everyone brings a different perspective," says Barbara. "Also, as a group adds more people—or more money—it can have more votes."

Stina Hans, who has lived on Via Alegre for 34 years and been part of the Women's Fund leadership team for 14 years, serves as Group Captain Liaison. "Each group has its own culture and personality, and they evolve over time," she notes. "Some meet only once a year to vote on the ballot and some socialize more often. Some

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are built around common interests like reading, hiking or a particular neighborhood." As an example, Linda Lorenzen, who lives on Cuervo Avenue, started a group called Hope that originally consisted entirely of Hope Ranch residents. And Hope Ranch Living Publisher, Cindy Feinberg, is starting a group as a result of this story! The Hope Ranch Living group is open to all Hope Ranch residents, HRL staff and sponsors.

In her role as Group Captain Liaison, Stina plays matchmaker for new members. Sometimes she helps women make a connection to an existing group and, in other cases, she guides them in forming a group of their own. Sheri Fay who lives on Estrella joined the Heart²Heart group when she was invited by a neighbor, Denise Lilly. After one year, she decided to recruit friends, including parents she'd met through San Marcos High school, to form a second group called Empty Nesters.

After votes from groups and individuals are tabulated each spring, grant recipients are announced at an inspiring Celebration of Grants event. In the fall, a series of educational forums and site visits give members additional insight into how the grants have impacted community issues.

For fifteen years, the Women's Fund has managed this ambitious program with volunteers, generous underwriters, a few contractors and paid administrative help from the Santa Barbara Foundation. This year, with support from the Santa Barbara Foundation, the Women's Fund became an independent nonprofit. "Our goal has always been to maximize impact by giving significant grants and keeping costs as low as possible," says Sarah de Tagyos. "Now with more than a thousand members, we will need even more volunteer leaders and more sponsors to help offset costs associated with growth including improved technology and larger venues for our education programs."



From Left: Stina Hans, Captain of TLC including members Karen Carey, MJ Baumgartner, Cynthia Krueger.

“ It’s a great way to engage with other smart women who care about making a difference. ”

Women in Hope Ranch are drawn to the Women's Fund for many reasons. Some appreciate the opportunity to learn about local nonprofits through ballot discussions, educational programs and occasional written reports from the Research Committee. "Part of our mission is to tap into Women Power by creating a large community of educated, strategic givers," says Sarah de Tagyos. As an example, she notes that forums on community issues are planned for this fall, and the Research Committee will

release a report on poverty in south Santa Barbara county that grew out of their work.

Others Women's Fund members value the simplicity of the organization. "Donating to the Women's Fund is so much better than participating in a fundraising event," says Cathy Cash who lives on Las Palmas and recently



Individual members: From left, Carolyn Jabs, Denise Lilly, Marsha Roberson, Stina Hans and Cathy Cash.

joined Women's Fund as an individual member. "The research is impressive so you know the money is going to something worthwhile." Still, other members are drawn by the flexibility that allows women to expand or collapse their commitment depending on their other obligations. "You can contribute time and money at a level that's right for you," says Heike Tennant who lives on Corta Road and also volunteers at the Assistance League.

Most members value the connections they have made with other women through the Women's Fund. "The Women's Fund is comprised of some of the smartest people I know," says Stina Hans. "It's a great way to engage with other smart women who care about making a difference." JoJo Barker who lives at Via Huerta agrees. "It's a moral community that comes together around a common purpose. The women in this group are women you want to meet!"

More information about the Women's Fund and their programs is available at womensfunds.org. Click on the Join Tab to find out how to join as an Individual or Group member. For additional information about how to join or start a group, send an email to info@womensfunds.org.



Rhea Hayes, Cindy Feinberg with Wendy Gronsky of the Spinners and Friends group.



Kate Mead and Barbara Cronin Hershberg from Ten for Transformation.

If you are interested in joining the Hope Ranch Living group, Stina Hans will be hosting a get together at her house on Thursday, November 14th from 5-7pm. To rsvp for the HRL group or to learn more about joining other groups please contact Stina Hans at stinahans@icloud.com.

Box: Women's Fund at a Glance

- Founded: 2004
- Number of members today: more than 1,000
- Amount granted to nonprofits in 2019: \$585,000
- Amount donated since 2004: more than \$7.2 million
- Number of members in Hope Ranch: 44
- Number of groups with Hope Ranch members: 21