

Redlands Police Department
Volunteer Park Ranger Program
September 21, 2007

Redlands has many tremendous attributes that contribute to its reputation as the “Jewel of the Inland Empire.” Among them is its system of 14 parks – comprising more than 143 acres – that provide opportunities for people to hike, fish, picnic or otherwise enjoy themselves in peaceful environs.

Like most public places in Redlands, the parks are quite safe. However, there are public safety issues located in and around the parks that must be addressed. Vandalism, transient “urban camping,” illegal dumping, drinking and drug use occur periodically in every one of our parks. These activities are frequently difficult to observe from the street and are only observable from within the parks. The Redlands Police Department is charged with maintaining the safety of the parks and is having increasing challenges in doing so. Our parks deserve to be treated as invaluable assets by having substantially more attention paid to their safety.

Over the last several years, the City has been forced to reduce the taxpayer-funded, public safety resources available to the RPD. This has compelled the department to increasingly rely on its *Citizen Volunteer Patrol* (CVP). The CVP is a group of 65 dedicated citizens who volunteer a minimum of 10 hours a month assisting the RPD. Yearly, the members of the CVP typically contribute more than 16,000 volunteer hours.

To enhance the safety of Redlands’ parks the RPD is proposing the addition of a *Volunteer Park Ranger Program* to function under the auspices of the department’s Civilian Volunteer Patrol and is seeking public donations to facilitate the creation of the program.

Many cities have paid, fulltime park rangers that focus on protecting the public’s interests in parks and publicly owned open space (i.e. Riverside, Buena Park, Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, etc.). Redlands’ current financial constraints preclude hiring such employees. However, the RPD has a rich history of leveraging its employee resources through the use of volunteers to meet increasing public safety demands and public expectations when budgetary resources are unavailable. This program is an example of how the RPD can fulfill its public safety mission without adding a burden to the City’s *General Fund*.

As envisioned, the unarmed Park Rangers will wear distinctive “ranger” uniforms that clearly identify them as volunteer members of the RPD. They will have RPD police radios and be in constant communications with police dispatchers and officers. They will patrol the parks on foot, bicycle, ATV’s and, perhaps, even on their own horses (reminiscent of the RPD’s *Mounted Posse* that operated in the 1980’s). Like members of the CVP, they will be the “eyes and ears” of the Police and Public Works Departments in the parks reporting criminal activity and park maintenance or safety issues. They will also provide public assistance to people using the parks (i.e. directions, information, basic first aid, etc.). Their training will be similar to that which the members of the CVP are provided. The program’s initial funding needs – met by a generous \$5,000 donation from the Kiwanis Club of Redlands (Noon) – include uniforms, badges, radios, daypacks, miscellaneous equipment and promotional materials. Its sustainability will be ensured through the same mechanisms the RPD uses to maintain its other volunteer programs.

The leadership of the Redlands Police Department believes that *Volunteer Park Rangers* will help ensure that our parks remain safe and continue being the priceless community jewels they are today. With a relatively small amount of community support, this vision can become a reality.