



Victim and witness helper  
Donna Rodoni (above); stroke center  
volunteer Jim Slater

**O**UR society's attitude toward volunteers could justifiably be called schizophrenic. We honor them, admire them, support them — we do just about everything, in fact, except pay them.

At other levels, volunteerism is subtly or not so subtly discouraged. One of the first things new military recruits hear in boot camp is "never volunteer for anything," usually followed by the command: "I need three volunteers — you, you and you." Kids who volunteer to help in the classroom earn the derisive soubriquet "teacher's pet," and their adult counterparts are "do-gooders."

Yet despite the mixed message society sends them, volunteers continue to sign up. They run political campaigns and fund-raising drives, bring us public radio and television, keep the fine arts alive and Congress on its toes.

But at bottom, most simply want to help other people, an astonishing thing in the "I want it all now get out of my way" America of the 1980s.

That spasm of self-serving materialism is bound to pass like all fads. What remains constant is the will to do what needs to be done — from pulling people out of the winter surf to lining up wheelchairs in a hallway. It's a humanizing impulse that can't be bought at any price.

Below are brief profiles of several volunteers who help make Santa Cruz a humane place to live. There are thousands more like them.

# Why They Volunteer

Six Profiles  
by Tom Stevens

## Overcoming Courtroom Shock Syndrome

"I DON'T have to work any more," said retired pet store owner and travel consultant Donna Rodoni, "but I wanted to do something to occupy my time that was worthwhile."

What Rodoni found — through a friend in the county district attorney's office — was the "Victim and Witness Assistance Center," which for six years has been helping victims of violent crime cope with trauma and the courts.

Working from police reports, Rodoni and other "victim advocates" call people who have been assaulted, battered, burglarized, struck by "hit and run" drivers or otherwise harmed in crimes.

"We apprise them of their situation in the courts and offer lay-type counseling," said Rodoni, who, like other program volunteers, underwent two months of training. at the outset

of her "hitch."

"If the situation warrants, we encourage people to seek professional counseling," she added, "and we let them vent their angers and frustrations on us. If you've ever had any dealings with the courts, you know it takes a long time to go from point A to point Z, so we try to let them know that things are moving, even though they're moving slowly."

Rodoni said she asks crime victims how they're doing, if they've been to a doctor or counselor, and if they have "family support systems" they can rely on.

"Sometimes people are in a state of shock," she said, "so we offer whatever support we can. We'll come in and sit with them while they're waiting to be called to testify, and we'll offer visual support in the courtroom, because some-

times it's just the court officers, the assailant and the victim in there."

As a 30-year resident of Santa Cruz, Rodoni occasionally encounters a familiar name on the police blotter, and then must decide whether to take the case herself or pass it on.

"If I know the person, I try to evaluate the case and ask myself: How would they feel having me call them?" She said. "But if it was domestic violence, I wouldn't do it."

After a year with the program, Rodoni said "I really like what I'm doing — there's a lot of satisfaction in it. So I'm planning on staying." Then aside: "Besides, the staff members say they're going to triple my salary!"

Asking why she spends 10 hours a week doing stressful victim support work for free, Rodoni said simply: "I'm a giver." •

## A Big Supply of Positive Strokes

**T**EN years ago, assistant Santa Cruz fire chief Jim Slater was a hale and hearty 55 and looking forward to an active retirement. After 30 years in the community, the Wyoming native was well regarded and in top shape. All systems were go.

Then Slater suffered a stroke. It paralyzed his left side, left him unconscious for 11 days, and put him into intensive therapy for a year.

Much of the therapy and corresponding "attitude adjustment," as Slater calls it, took place at the Cabrillo College/Easter Seals Stroke Cen-

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# More Than a Firefighter

SOME people really do as adults what they dreamed about doing as kids.

In Ron Rickabaugh's case, his elementary school was across the street from a fire station, so he watched the trucks come and go, saw the firefighters working on their gear and perhaps got a better idea than most kids about what's really involved in that line of work.

Now Rickabaugh, 28, is in his sixth year as a volunteer firefighter with the Felton Fire Protection District. As volunteer commitments go, it's one of the heaviest: He carries a pager at all times and responds to as many as 250 calls a year in the district's five and a half square-mile area.

The work ranges from jimmying open locked cars and helping senior citizens back into their wheelchairs after household falls to rescuing injured hikers and trying to keep car crash victims from bleeding to death.

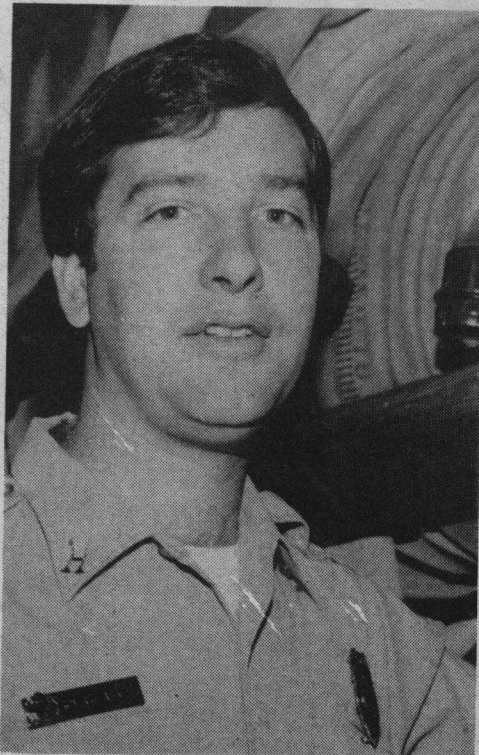
And there are fires, the most notable being the \$3 million blaze that gutted the Santa Cruz Lumber Co. in Felton last June.

"The fire was out in half an hour," Rickabaugh recalled, "but I was on that scene for 13 hours. When it was burning it was hot enough that we had two men who all they did was put the hoses on the trucks to keep the paint from peeling off."

In other fires, he and others on the 25-person Felton volunteer force must enter burning structures burdened with 40 to 50 pounds of protective clothing and breathing gear to search through the smoke for possible victims.

"When you enter a burning house with your breathing apparatus on, toting a hose and there's smoke all around so you can hardly see, you really bond right quick with the partner you go in with," Rickabaugh said, adding that this unique camaraderie is one of the things that keeps him going back.

"There are a lot of good friendships here at the



**Volunteer firefighter Ron Rickabaugh**

firehouse — joking, laughing and family things like barbecues and dinners as well as the hard times," he said.

For Rickabaugh, the hardest calls are auto wrecks and sudden infant deaths (SIDs).

"One time a man crashed in a Volkswagen. I was the first one there. He was all bloody and broken, but I just climbed into that VW with him. His scalp was peeled back and his hand was

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PHOTOS BY GREG MO

## Lifesaving Intensity

**Lifesaver Andrew Ward stays wary of the ocean**

WHEN the great winter swells hammer the cliffs of Santa Cruz and boom into its bays, fishermen will be plucked off the rocks, surfers swept out to sea and small craft swallowed up like canapes.

You can't pay people enough to rescue those unwary or unfortunate enough to get caught in the ocean on those angry winter days, so the job falls largely to volunteers. Andrew Ward is one of them.

As a city lifeguard, longtime surfer and 20-year Santa Cruz resident, Ward is no stranger to local ocean conditions, but he never lets familiarity breed contempt.

"Even after 15 years of surfing, I still get humbled by the ocean on a regular basis because it's such an awesome force," he said. "You've got to be aware of when things change — you need to be watchful around the ocean at all times."

Ward, 30, is in his second season with the Santa Cruz Volunteer Marine Rescue Unit, a new and still-evolving service coordinated by the city parks and recreation department.

Volunteers, many of them off-season lifeguards, spend 8 to 12 hours each month in rescue and first-aid training and commit to at least two 24-hour shifts per month.

When their pagers sound, they must be ready to don wetsuits, fins and rescue tubes and plunge into the heaving, 50-degree ocean.

Rapid response is essential, as an unprotected swimmer is given only a 50 percent chance of survival after spending an hour in Santa Cruz' 50-degree water, Ward said. But from a rescue standpoint, caution is more important still.

"You have to know when a situation is beyond your capabilities, when you have to get more help. You're preventing a single drowning from becoming two."

"You have to be rational about it," he continued. "Last year a fellow drowned trying to save a dog at Lighthouse Point, and the dog eventually made it back in. It's hard, but you have to learn to control those emotions."

As the "rookie" of the marine rescue unit, Ward hopes his volunteer work will further his lifeguarding skills and help him build a good working report with other rescuers.

"Remaining associated with the lifeguards over the winter months is important to maintaining your own intensity," he said, "and keeping everyone together as a unit is helping morale, keeping more lifeguards near the beach, where they need to be."

As for other rewards of volunteer ocean rescue work, Ward added: "The adrenalin's there for sure, and it's good to know you helped somebody."

(Readers interested in joining the rescue unit can call Rick Gould or Tom Lorenzen at 429-3747.)

## Building Block for a Career

AT 25, Jennifer Hightower has her priorities set. She will earn a master's degree in public administration, then enter government service in the highly-competitive Bay Area.

So why is she working as a full-time volunteer in the San Lorenzo Valley?

"To me it's like a building block for my career," Hightower said of her volunteer job as a San Lorenzo outreach worker of the county's health and social services programs. "The people who have the jobs I want have experience, so I see this as a road to gaining experience."

The San Francisco native graduated from Cal Poly with a social sciences degree and minors in political science and urban studies. Along with 50 cents, these accomplishments will get you a cup of coffee in Santa Cruz.

"I worked for a while with Big Brothers and Big Sisters," she said, "my job ended in May. I didn't want to waitress, so I tried a job placement agency, but they didn't have anything in government or community development. Then I saw an ad in the paper for this job, and it was exactly what I want to do. It's very fulfilling."

Hightower is working with Liz Lopez at the county's Human Resources agency to "get the word out" to San Lorenzo Valley residents about government services available through the county's Emeline Street complex.

The work includes issuing press releases, putting up posters, and addressing San Lorenzo Valley residents at community meetings and church food distributions. Programs covering everything from adoption to "river froth" are publicized.

"We tell them about nutrition services, immunization, well-baby programs, marriage licenses, women's health clinics, the pharmacy, adoption programs, mental health services, how to get physical exams and general medical care, food stamps, aid to families with dependent children, you name it," Hightower said.

By the time her six-month volunteer commitment ends in December, she said, she will have made contacts and gained experience that should help her get into graduate school, possibly at San Francisco State, and then into a government career.

"I want to build some of my skills up so I can become more marketable in the area," she said, adding that she and her husband hope to move to San Francisco eventually.

She credited her husband, who works in a local architectural and interior design firm, for supporting her financially during her six months of volunteer outreach work.



**Government services counselor Jennifer Hightower**



# What remains constant is the will to do what needs to be done

## Slater

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ter, then a year old and now a model for similar facilities elsewhere. There 60 to 65 students "learn how to get on with their lives," center director Edie Nelson said, through a program of mobility therapy, independent living training and speech classes.

The program is administered by highly trained professionals, she added, but the center couldn't function without volunteers like Jim Slater, who has spent the decade since his own recovery helping other stroke victims.

"I do everything but wash windows around here," he joked. "I put in two or three hours three days a week now, make coffee, get out the wheelchairs in the morning. When the students arrive, I'll help them get their name tags and schedules for the day — nothing too strenuous, just things that need to be done."

There were few volunteers when Slater was a patient himself, but now the center has 15 unpaid helpers, several of them stroke victims.

"I think we (volunteers) can help," Slater said. "The patient's first reaction is 'How can this happen to me?' Some get very depressed, because it's a hell of an adjustment and it takes a lot of hard work.

"But I tell them: 'One time I was just like you, and if I was able to do it, you can do it,'" said Slater, who figures he's about "95 percent" recovered from his own stroke.

"A lot of them don't believe I had a stroke," he said, adding that he enjoys seeing patients progress over the long term.

"It's nice to see somebody come in in a wheelchair to start with, then go to a walker, then a quad cane, then a cane, then get rid of the cane completely."

"In addition to his work at the center, Slater is president of the Santa Cruz Stroke Club, whose 40 to 50 members meet each month for lunch and socializing.

"I've made many, many friends through the stroke center and the club," he said. "Once you have a stroke, you become much closer to people. I know I did."

## Rickabaugh

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ripped open as you see some gruesome sights, and when you do CPR on somebody like that, they'll almost always throw up. You gotta stomach that. There's a lot of things you gotta put up with, but it just comes with the territory."

"Some folks say you just do your job and forget it, but sometimes you can't. I responded to sudden infant deaths, and I've never heard crying like a mother and father who've lost an

infant. That stays with you."  
Why does he do it?

"It's my way of helping out the community," said Rickabaugh, who works as a foreman at the Mount Hermon Christian Conference Center. "There's satisfaction in knowing that you attempted to help, that you can comfort people in a time of need.

"And, too, what keeps me going is now I'm a captain," he joked, "and the chief will have my hide if I quit."

## There When Women Need Her

LINDA Allen blocks out 60 hours each month when she will stay close to a phone to field calls from women who need help. She particularly enjoys being a volunteer "help line" counselor for the Santa Cruz Women's Crisis Support Center because, not long ago, she was on the other end of the line.

"I first became aware of the service when I called to find out about women's support groups in the area," Allen said. "Part of that support I needed a year ago I'm getting in a different way now."

The Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce employee currently works four to five 12-hour crisis line shifts each month, generally handling three calls a shift.

"Our function is to listen and let them pour out whatever," she said, "and if they need referral, we have a list of numbers they can call. But most often, I think they just need to talk with someone."

Unlike many other volunteer situations, Allen's work demands "total confidentiality," so she never meets the people she talks with and gives only her first name. Thus the personal "feedback" and the satisfaction of seeing positive results that nourish other volunteers are missing from Allen's work, but there are other rewards.

"I feel real good as a person that I can do this," she said. "I give myself a pat on the back. And sometimes people will end a conversation by saying 'Thank you for being there.' That's all somebody has to say, and it's worthwhile to

me."

She and other crisis line volunteers undergo 20 hours of "intensive training" in alcohol and drug abuse, family violence and telephone counseling, Allen said, but she is quick to add that emergency calls, rapes and other major crises are referred to professional staff counselors.

The center also operates a shelter for battered women and children, but Allen said that in a year of crisis line work she hasn't had to refer anyone to the shelter.

**"Sometimes people will say, 'Thank you for being there,' and it's worthwhile."**

"Most just have a problem that they need to talk about," she said, "and not necessarily a problem involving a man. Some have children, teen-agers they're having trouble with; some unemployed and feeling low."

Whatever the situation, Allen is happy to lend a sympathetic ear. "I can't think of any other volunteer work that I would get as much from," she said.