



Friends of Los Altos, Inc. (FOLA)

A non-profit, non-partisan, volunteer-run organization

For our children and our children's children...

To all Los Altos parents, grandparents and concerned residents: Our children and grandchildren may lose an enriching and unique resource that brought nature alive for young campers as well as educational and celebratory experiences. Halsey House and the Children's Programs at Redwood Grove are at stake.

We know that a few of you may be thinking that we are going to discuss the Moody Blue's 5th album, released in November 1969 entitled "To our children's children's children", but alas we are not. Today we are asking you to read the following article and if you want to bring back the Children's Programs at Redwood Grove and retain an updated Halsey House, please write to and/or speak out at the upcoming Park and Recreation Commission meeting taking place on Wednesday, February 10th, at 7:00pm.

As parents we do many things for our children—trying to give them as much as, if not more than we had growing up. Often that means enriching their lives with experiences that will help them grow into well rounded, successful adults. For those of us who have children who grew up in Los Altos in the 1980-2008 timeframe, in many cases our children participated in activities at Redwood Grove. For those of you who don't have children, or they are older or younger, ask a Los Alto parent or child about their memories from camps, scout activities and other events held at our unique preserve. We could talk about what it meant to our children, but better to quote some residents who responded to an outreach by one of the park commissioners.

A 26-year-young Los Altos resident who grew up in town says it so much more eloquently and personally than we ever could:

My varied experiences at Redwood Grove and Halsey House in many ways shaped both my childhood and my passion for the outdoors. Growing up in Los Altos, I had birthday parties (my own and others), camp sessions, playdates with friends, and exhilarating afternoons holding tarantulas larger than my hands, improving my archery skills, and marveling at the beauty in our own suburban backyard. Redwood Grove is an integral part of the adolescent experience in Los Altos that I hope to provide to my children someday.

The programs that run by the Recreation Department were regularly sold out within hours of registration opening. Parents appreciated the activities and saw value in the indoor and outdoor activities that children could partake in:

Redwood Grove is a very special hidden gem in Los Altos. It provides children with a unique opportunity to enjoy and learn about nature. My children have very fond memories of their birthday party and their elementary school trips to Redwood Grove. They remember doing archery, learning about the forest and Native American people, holding a tarantula (under the supervision of the Ranger), doing archery, and watching the ranger start a fire using sticks. Los Altos is fortunate to have such a peaceful, beautiful and educational grove for all ages to enjoy.

And from another parent:

*All three of my children have wonderful memories of Redwood Grove camp. Keith was a great leader, but the program went beyond just one individual. The opportunity for our kids to explore and be "safely adventurous" in the blackberry bushes and creek were so very valuable. I teach second grade in Los Altos and know that kids spent more and more time on screens even before distance learning, and what they really need are **unscripted outdoor experiences**. It also gave high school students a chance to experience leadership and responsibility. If there is a way to restore this wonderful program, I am sure parents throughout the city and county would be thrilled. If Los Altos is blessed with the space, we owe it to our kids to give them a chance to experience "camp".*

Many of the programs held at Redwood Grove used Halsey House as an integral part of the activities. Whether it was viewing Ohlone artifacts, cooking acorns in the kitchen, listening to a talk by a local naturalist, interacting with some of the animals that were part of the region, or attending an overnight camp, indoor space was required. It is the primary reason programming was almost entirely eliminated when Halsey House closed in 2008 due to lack of proper maintenance and repair by the City. And for those of you who don't know, the Halsey family not only built the house on the land they had acquired in the 1920s, they also planted all the redwood trees that grace the preserve. In that way the house and the redwood are inextricably tied together.

But Halsey House was used for many other activities, including Scout meetings and art programs as well as birthday parties. Another parent:

As a former Girl Scout leader, the use of the Halsey House within the nature preserve of Redwood Grove, proved to be one of the greatest assets of our community. In this area, nature and open land are scarce. Having the Halsey House for a meeting location combined with Redwood Grove, brought a level of experiential learning and growth to Troop # 61427. Regardless of the needs of future scouting troops, preservation of this historical structure would only enhance the uniqueness of Los Altos and bring a higher quality of appreciation for our history.

An additional parent had this to offer:

I am writing to support the restoration of Halsey House. Although now grown, my two children spent many summers at Redwood Grove camps and programs. Some of their favorite memories are holding snakes and romping in the Creek. There are so few places in our area where kids get to experience the beauty and playfulness of nature. I hope that you will make an effort to keep Redwood Grove a thriving and magical part of Los Altos.

And one last parent:

Both of my children attended countless events at Redwood Grove. They each had several birthday party celebrations there. I remember each year scouring the Los Altos Park and Rec schedule of summer camps to find the camps at Redwood Grove and sign up for them as early as possible before they were full. We attended family week-ends there. Our Girl and Boy Scout troops held events there.

My children learned to love and appreciate all nature can offer – lessons that have impacted their activities into adulthood. The Redwood Grove programs, the Grove itself and the house in which we cut so many birthday cakes and served so many snacks helped bring our family together and shape our children into the environmentally concerned and sensitive young adults they now are.

Redwood Grove always has been, and hopefully, always will be a treasure of Los Altos.

So why write this article? The City Council asked various City commissions to make recommendations as to what should happen to Halsey House, whose existence enables programs to take place at Redwood Grove. There is a meeting scheduled by the Park and Recreation commission and both the Historical and Financial Commissions will meet in the next few months to provide input to the City Council.

To date staff, without any input from the community has said no facilities are needed at Redwood Grove and that existing programs can be held at the new community center. But that means most of the activities that used to be held at Redwood Grove would not be reinstated. The Park and Recreation Commission is making their recommendation to City Council at the upcoming meeting on Wednesday February 10th. What is disappointing is there has been little public outreach by the Commission and, to date, no effort to get resident input. If you care about restoring the programming that was previously offered at Redwood Grove, the Commission needs to hear from you.

To quote the 26-year-old resident who participated in programs at Redwood Grove in the early 2000s:

It would be a shame to see another of the region's last vestiges of natural beauty removed in the unfortunate effort to scrub the heritage we have inherited. Our region of the world and of the country is incredibly special, and we owe it to our residents and our children in the name of great American conservation to keep these places alive.

At a time when kids are handed iPads the day they turn five, it's more important than ever to preserve local environmental programs that expose kids to the world around them and the beauty that the Peninsula has to offer. The world is changing — historical buildings are being tastelessly renovated in preference of cement and minimalism, and it harms the sense of wonder and community that makes Los Altos so special. Ecological preservation is just another flavor of this culture — Redwood Grove is a place where kids squeal holding their first spiders and snakes, watch in amazement as the tannins in Redwood cones turn water red, and connect with their friends and community in ways that are rare and beautiful. To tear down a center of learning, exploration, and nature would be unconscionable.

Please, for your children, for your grandchildren, for your neighbors' children, let the Park and Recreation Commission know the depth of the value in the unique programs at Redwood Grove and how much value there is in the Halsey House facility once it is refurbished and ready for its next 100 years of service to the community. It is your legacy for all Los Altans, great and small.

Call to action:

Email the Park and Recreation Commission **before** February 10th crichardson@losaltosca.gov and/or

Attend the meeting on Wednesday, February 10, at 7 pm and be prepared to speak on Item #2, Halsey House Structure Recommendation. Follow this link to find out how to attend via telephone or internet https://www.losaltosca.gov/sites/default/files/fileattachments/parks_and_recreation_commission/meeting/55861/2021_02-10_regular_meeting_-_parc_agenda.pdf

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