

Point Lobos, long ADA accessible, gets its first wheelchair-bound docent

By CHRIS COUNTS

WELL KNOWN for its wheelchair accessible hiking trails, Point Lobos State Reserve now has a docent who uses a wheelchair.

Diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, Carrieann Hess graduated May 18 from a training program at Point Lobos and will now help visitors discover the scenic wonders of the reserve.

“My main goal as a docent is to be able to share this magnificent place with those visitors,” she explained. “Tied in with that is my

goal to reach out to visitors of every age and any background who use a wheelchair, a walker, crutches, a cane, or simply move slower than those not living with mobility challenges.”

To become a docent, Hess, who is 32, first had to learn how to negotiate the reserve’s ADA trails.

“One challenge was traversing the ADA trails independently using my manual wheelchair,” Hess said. “With practice and determination I am now able to independently navigate the Sea Lion Point trail, even though it takes some time and effort.”

In addition to helping others enjoy Point Lobos, Hess aims to empower those with limited mobility.

“I hope to inspire individuals living with multiple sclerosis to get outside and back to nature,” she said. “I hope to inspire others living with disabilities to come out to the reserve with the mentality, ‘Don’t say it can’t be done until you try it first.’ You may surprise yourself. And even if it is difficult, or you’re unable to participate with complete independence, this is one place on earth you don’t want to miss, no matter what your limitations or difficulties may be.”

Another docent, Alexanne Mills, called Hess an inspiration to everybody here at Point Lobos.

“Her spirit is absolutely amazing,” Mills said.

Thankfully for Hess and others who face mobility challenges, Point Lobos is well prepared to accommodate them. Four trails at the reserve totaling over three miles —the Sea Lion Point Trail, the Carmelo Meadow

Trail, the Bird Island Trail and the Granite Point Trail — have all been upgraded to ADA standards within the past 13 years.

The cost of the upgrading the trails is shared by taxpayers and private donors. The Bird Island Trail upgrades, for instance, cost between \$750,000 and \$1 million, according to Anna Patterson, a spokeswoman for the Point Lobos Foundation. The foundation contributed \$100,000.

The foundation is now trying to raise \$157,000 for ADA upgrades along the half-mile-long Lace Lichen Trail. Taxpayers will fund the balance of the \$300,000 project.

Also benefiting those with limited mobility is the reserve’s Easy Access Adventures program, which offers guided and supported hikes on six different days over the next three months: May 7, May 10, June 4, June 18, July 2 and July 16.

If you would like to make a donation to support ADA trail upgrades or learn more about the Easy Access Adventures program, visit www.pointlobos.org.

One of the newest docents at Point Lobos State Reserve is Carrieanna Hess, who doesn’t let her limited mobility stop her from sharing the park with visitors.



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