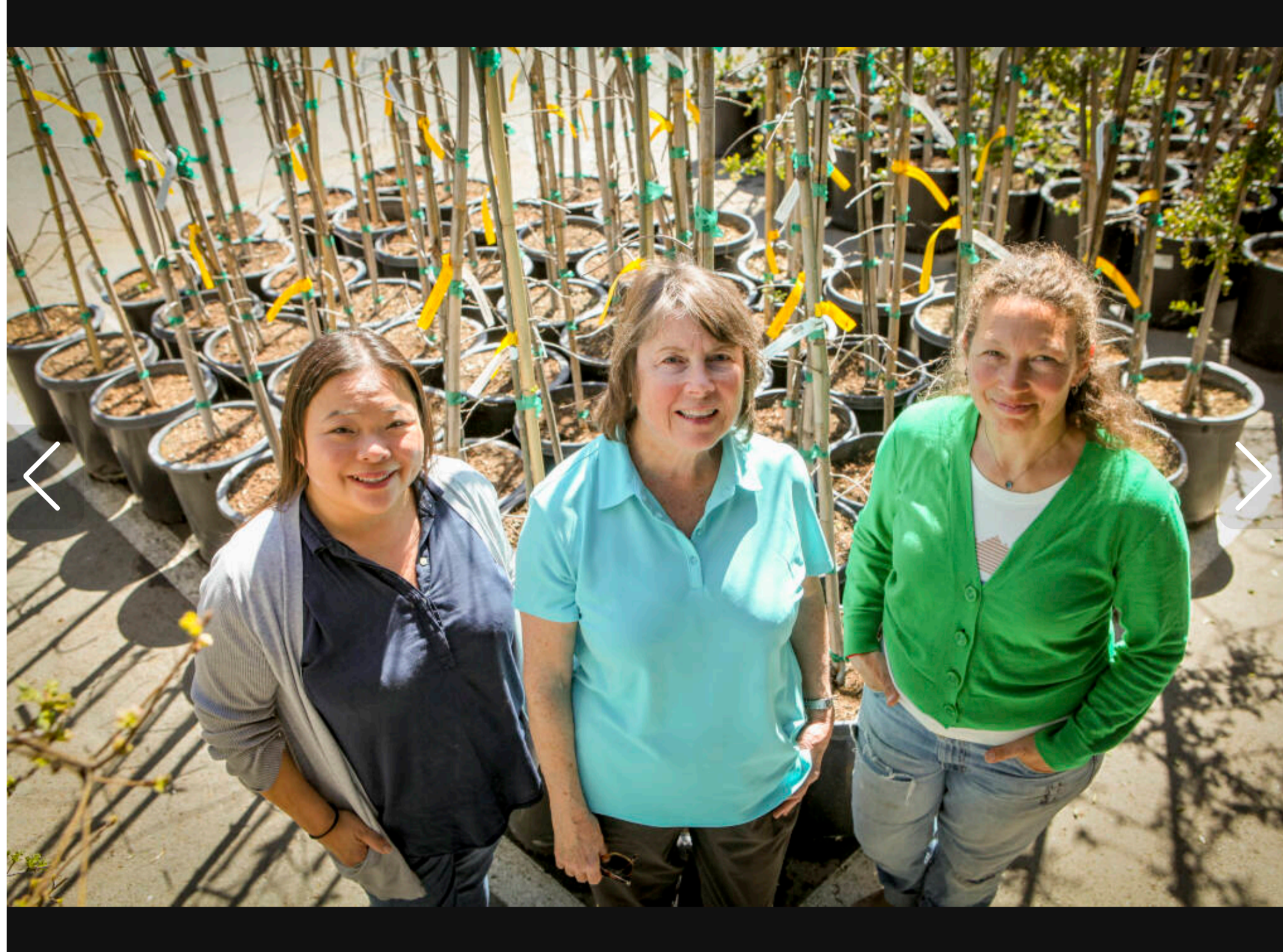


ReLeaf to plant 150 trees in Wiseman Park



SLIDE 1 OF 10
"This project will be a wonderful opportunity to work with eager volunteers," says Michelle Loftin (far right), the project coordinator for the planting effort. Also shown: Cindy Chong of Parks and Recreation (far left) and Wendy Jacobs (Center) (CRISSY PASCUAL/ARGUS-COURIER STAFF)

JANET PERRY
ARGUS-COURIER CONTRIBUTOR
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The City of Petaluma has committed itself to increasing the town's native tree canopy. Next weekend, there will be many hands on deck to help make that a reality. On April 9, a small army of volunteers representing numerous local organizations and the city will come together to plant 150 trees in Petaluma's Wiseman Park.

ReLeaf Petaluma's founder, Wendy Jacobs, is describing the event as a massive partnership exercise.

"We really treasure these partnerships that we're developing with organizations and individuals," Jacobs said. "I really find that the great diversity of opinions and ideas has been tremendously helpful. It's really helping us to find our path, our way."

In addition to folks from ReLeaf Petaluma, other participating organizations include Rebuilding Together Petaluma and the Petaluma People's Services Center. Several members of the Petaluma High School Environmental Club have also signed up to help with the planting.

There will be a kick-off ceremony at 9 a.m. where Mayor Teresa Barrett will speak. Mayor Barrett has long been a supporter of increasing Petaluma's native tree canopy.

"Trees really are super important to me and I was so happy to see a group like ReLeaf come together in Petaluma," Barrett said. She noted that this is not the first time Petalumans have taken on such a task. It reminds her of the year 2008, when 150 trees were planted in honor of Petaluma's 150th year. "Taking on this 150-tree planting is really a spectacular event for us and it's something we're doing for the future."

During the day-long activity, an anticipated 200 volunteers will be broken into pods focused on planting trees in different areas of the park, creating a long line of arboreal splendor in open areas throughout the park. Each pod will have one or two leaders to help them do the planting. The species that will be planted are big leaf maples, white oaks, coast live oaks, sycamores and cottonwood trees.

The Petaluma People's Services Center's Executive Director Elece Hempel is coordinating a group of teens who will be trained to help with the planting. Afterwards, the teens will be treated to a special session with several professionals from the tree industry to talk about careers in the field. Once the planting has been done, volunteers will gather for Tortilla Real burritos, sponsored by Lind Marine.

According to Jacobs, the city council, the mayor and Petaluma Parks Superintendent Cindy Chong have all been very supportive of the project. Jacobs also praised the work of Michelle Loftin, ReLeaf's parks lead and project manager for the Wiseman Park effort, who has been coordinating the effort.

"She's a great project leader and she's been pulling together all of the organizations," Jacobs said.

Loftin is overseeing the effort to place 3000 or more trees into local parks in coming months and years.

"This project will be a wonderful opportunity to work with eager volunteers," Loftin said. "I'm excited to see the parks, especially this very popular one, with more native trees adding shade and beauty."

Jacobs, a naturalist who is inspired by native trees and plants, thinks of a healthy canopy of trees as the kitchen of nature.

"They provide food," she said. "Food is the lynch pin of all natural systems and big shade trees are the heavy lifters and the backbone of our natural systems."

Jacobs has an expertise in big shade trees and said that they're the best at solving the three big problems of our day; climate, pollution and biodiversity. Jacobs hopes that the long line of shade trees being planted in Wiseman Park will help mitigate the pollution coming from the nearby airport. They will also help to sequester carbon and increase biodiversity.

Though the April 9 planting event already has its full capacity of volunteers, ReLeaf Petaluma will be having more events in the future, and is always thankful and happy to receive donations. Every new tree planted in Petaluma costs approximately 100 dollars. Jacobs said the nonprofit is encouraging people to offset vacation travel by donating a tree to Petaluma, to mitigate their travel carbon.

"It's something a few of us have been doing when we fly," she said. "People want to do something to make a difference."

ReLeaf received funding for the Wiseman Park project from a Calfire TreeCovery Grant. They're also interested in attracting corporate and private philanthropy donors.

"We have good projects that may not lend themselves to grant funding," she said. This would include pilot projects for planting trees in hard to reach places and for organizational funding for outreach and education.

Want to be involved?

No more volunteers are needed for the April 9 event, but more will be required for future plantings. Go to Releafpetaluma.org to sign up for updates. To donate to the tree-planting efforts of ReLeaf Petaluma, or to sponsor a tree, donations can be made on line at ReleafPetalyma.org or GoFundMe.com.

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