

VOLUNTEER NOTES

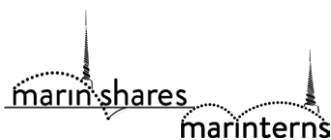
Where Are They Now?

Former Marintern **Sophie Helpard** became the County of Marin’s legislative affairs associate a few months ago. She graduated from UC Berkeley last May with a master’s degree in public affairs. She secured a graduate internship with the Office of the County Executive, where her paid duties included a boards and commissions project with the Clerk of the Board. She also supported development of the [FixItMarin](#) app, which lets residents easily report non-emergency issues in unincorporated Marin.

“I learned about the power of local government through my master’s program at the Goldman School of Public Policy,” Sophie said. Following her internship, she found success quickly when she applied for the legislative affairs role and was hired. A staff member with the Office of the County Executive since October, she helps manage the county’s relationships with local, state, and federal governments.

Holiday

County offices will be closed Monday, February 16, for Presidents Day.



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Father-Son Partners Fly Air Patrol Missions

By Scott Harrop

MarinShares volunteers **Michael Koonce** and his son **Mason Koonce** are accomplished pilots who assist the Marin County Sheriff’s Air Patrol in its many functions. “Service runs deep in the Koonce family,” says Undersheriff **Sylvia Moir**.

Michael earned his pilot license at age 18 and credits his mother for supporting his dream; she matched his pay dollar for dollar as he worked with airport instructors while studying at Sacramento State University. Later, he started a high-pressure gas transport business and opened a plant in Nevada. He needed a better way to travel there from his Bay Area home. Today, he keeps a Citation M2 jet at Gness Field in Novato.

His son Mason describes him as a “man of many trades,” and one of his earliest memories of his dad is joining him in the pilot’s seat.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL KOONCE

Mason Koonce and Michael Koonce

“Mason has flown with me since he was born,” says Michael proudly.

Although Mason began his studies as pre-med, then switched to public health,

Continued on page 3

He Never Says ‘Nyet’ When Asked to Assist

By Marjorie Grannan



PHOTO BY AMANDA KONDRASHOVA

Russian-born **Ivan Kondrashov** recalls being unhappy that his parents enrolled him in an elementary school where he would learn English. “Because, when was I ever going to use English?”

The MarinShares volunteer dismisses the notion—gleaned from his college records—that he speaks six languages, including ASL.

“Also,” he continued, “what you learned in Russian schools was British English. We moved here in 1997, just in time for me to attend the last quarter of eighth grade. Landing in an American middle school sounding like a British transplant

Continued on page 2

Ivan Kondrashov reads aloud to kids at the Marin City Library.

He Never Says 'Nyet' When Asked to Assist

Continued from page 1

with a Russian accent took some adjustment.”

Ivan's family lived in the southern Siberian cities of Tomsk and then Novosibirsk before moving to the Bay Area when he was 13. In college, Ivan majored in linguistics and began his career in software development and engineering.

He married his librarian wife **Amanda Kondrashova** in 2016. In 2023 Amanda was offered a position at the Marin City branch of the Marin County Free Library, and they moved to San Rafael.

“I started helping Amanda with things like event setup, and branched out from there,” Ivan said. “Before long I became a county volunteer: the website and language collection aide.”

“It's wonderful having Ivan at Marin City Library,” said Senior Librarian **Rashida Skaar**, Ivan's staff supervisor. “He does everything from assisting us with painting our local school library to making appearances as Darth Vader for Star Wars Day and Grandfather Frost for Russian Storytime.” (Amanda made Ivan's costumes for both roles.)

“Ivan's fluency in Russian helps us immensely,” Rashida added. “He translates children's books into Russian for Russian Storytime and is helping us curate and launch our Russian collection.”



PHOTO BY AMANDA KONDRASHOVA

Ivan Kondrashov plays Grandfather Frost, a mythical character who brings gifts for the secular new year.

“In Marin City, the concentration of affordable housing makes it a natural landing point for new immigrants,” Ivan said. “One group of library patrons that has grown includes immigrants from the former Soviet Bloc—Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus—and a scattering of other countries. That inspired us to start a new

collection of children's books in Russian and Ukrainian.”

Amanda's ideas blossomed into Russian Storytime. “It's a combination of storytime and an opportunity for kids and adults to mingle and speak the language afterwards,” Ivan explained. When he noticed the library had started running out of Russian material, he began translating children's books into Russian.

“Kids' books require a very different approach. Each one has its own voice and vocabulary, on top of all the usual difficulties with translation,” he said. “At this point, we have a couple dozen books translated. I also find Russian songs that work for the ‘wiggle breaks,’ and sometimes get invited to read a story myself.”

In addition, Ivan assists with “random things that need doing around the branch, especially for someone who's a foot taller than most of the staff.” He puts up posters, hauls supplies for events, helps with program setup, takes donations to the Friends of the Library bookstore in Novato, and performs other duties as assigned, such as “helping with a lightsaber construction workshop and then playing Darth Vader so the kids get some use out of them.”

“Knowledgeable and dedicated volunteers like Ivan are such a gift to patrons and staff,” Rashida said. “We're so grateful that he generously donates his time and skills to improve library services for residents.” ■

Volunteers Test Navigator Role

PHOTO BY DOUG KAYE



MarinShares volunteers **Ruth-Louise Moran**, left, **Sophia McLane**, center, and staff liaison **Caroline Hopkins** helped test the concept of a potential new volunteer role at the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Marin Civic Center. Ruth-Louise and Sophia donned blue vests with “Need Help? Ask Me” printed on the back and walked through the Administration Wing and Hall of Justice, helping visitors find their way around the often-bewildering halls. The three-day pilot in late January involved eight additional MarinShares volunteers. Deputy County Executive **Crosby Burns** from the Office of the County Executive (OCE) led the pilot. OCE staff is evaluating detailed feedback from volunteers and visitors. If a new navigator role is eventually created, it will be posted on the [MarinShares volunteer opportunities page](#).

Father-Son Partners Fly Air Patrol Missions

Continued from page 1

he never directly used his degree. Instead, he nurtured his love of flying. “The passion was deep,” he says. He began piloting a turbo prop out of San Rafael. As he amassed flying hours, he developed a network of pilots and plane owners. “I was a real hangar rat, flying around every airport in California and leaving my business cards.”

The two men sometimes work together in the family compressed-gas business. But Mason’s main love is as a freelance pilot for private planes, flying all over the East Coast, as far as the Bahamas and Key West. He plans to stay private: “I’d like to work up to the big bad Gulfstreams and Globals—29-seaters! They can cost up to \$80 million.”

Father and son joined the Air Patrol at the request of one of Mason’s friends’ parents, who worked at the Sheriff’s



Father and son pilots Mason and Michael Koonce at Reno-Tahoe Airport.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL KOONCE

were able to predict when the body of a deceased sailor would float back to the surface. The plane flew a search pattern, spotted the target, then circled until jet ski riders arrived to retrieve the body.

Michael remembers working a cold-case murder in which a suspect was identified, and the city needed a fast plane to reach the scene, with officers and medical staff.

office. Since then, they have logged some dramatic experiences.

They provide surveillance during law enforcement missions, flying at 3,000 to 6,000 feet. One pilot spots the action below and liaises with air control, while the other controls air speed and altitude.

Mason described a recent search and rescue mission following the capsizing of a vessel in San Pablo Bay. Authorities

Undersheriff Moir sums up the volunteer partnership: “Mike’s years of leadership, wisdom, and commitment in business and as a pilot have laid the foundation, and Mason carries it forward with skill, energy, and heart—together exemplifying how a father and son can serve side by side to bring professionalism, compassion, and justice from the air to the Marin County community below.” ■

Happy Anniversary

We congratulate these volunteers who celebrate their anniversaries this month and thank them for their ongoing involvement.

47 YEARS

Bill Bastida (San Rafael), Air Patrol Volunteer, Marin County Sheriff’s Office

29 YEARS

Steve Toquinto (Novato), Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service/Auxiliary Communications Service (RACES/ACS) Volunteer, Marin County Fire

17 YEARS

Peter Otis (Novato), RACES/ACS Volunteer, Marin County Fire

14 YEARS

Michael Landram (Novato), Patrol Volunteer, Marin County Parks

9 YEARS

Mark Klein (Novato), RACES/ACS Volunteer, Marin County Fire

Lynda Pearson (Mill Valley), Civic Center Tour Docent, Cultural Services Department, and Branding Consultant, Human Resources

7 YEARS

James Cook (Rohnert Park), Veterans Remains Officer, Health & Human Services (HHS)

John Donaghue (Walnut Creek), Cartoonist, Human Resources

Kathleen Pear (San Anselmo), Senior Peer Counselor, HHS

Rita Wengler (Novato), Senior Peer Counselor, HHS

6 YEARS

Cynthia Bellows (Mill Valley), **Peter Nielsen** (San Rafael), Marin Center Ushers, Cultural Services Department

Jackie Herzog (San Rafael), Friends of the Family Volunteer, HHS

5 YEARS

Donna Eng (San Rafael), **Blair Ogden** (San Rafael), Senior Peer Counselors, HHS

Anthony Fedanzo (Corte Madera), **Ann Shores** (Corte Madera), Radio Communications Volunteers, Department of Public Works

4 YEARS

Bea Goop-Lott (San Rafael), Meals on Wheels Client Assessment Volunteer, HHS

Robert Rowlands (Mill Valley), Radio Communications Volunteer, Department of Public Works

3 YEARS

Ed Essick (Petaluma), Radio Communications Volunteer, Department of Public Works

Jayne Goodale (San Anselmo), Environmental Steward, Marin County Parks

1 YEAR

Christopher Logan (Emeryville), Coro Fellow, Community Development Agency

Cheers for Successful FIRE Foundry Recruits



PHOTO BY NATALIE ALBERTON

Marin County Fire Department (MCFD) recruits recently celebrated the successful completion of their one-year FIRE Foundry internships and EMT training. The group benefitted from the support of leaders pictured with them, including MCFD Interim Fire Chief **Mike Marcucci**, Conservation Corps North Bay FIRE Foundry Fuels Crew Coordinator **Mariah Chastain**, College of Marin Director of Allied Health **Angela Olmanson**, College of Marin President **Jonathan Eldridge**, MCFD Captain **Darrell Galli**, and FIRE Foundry Program Coordinator **Mimi Choudhury**. The event was held at the College of Marin's Indian Valley campus on December 18. The FIRE Foundry program supports recruits as they explore fire service-related careers and build competitiveness for future employment. Education is a key component of the program. Some recruits may become firefighters while others pursue related work in medicine, public safety, and environmental conservation. (The FIRE in FIRE Foundry stands for Fire, Innovation, Recruitment, and Education.)

Who's New & Welcome!

Julian Campo (San Rafael), Student Elections Ambassador, Elections Department

Sammy Chew (San Rafael), District 2 Intern, Board of Supervisors

Astrid Craig (Stockton), Post-Conviction Case Intern, Public Defender's Office

Cosette Cresalia-Clark (Novato), Teen Volunteer, Novato Library

Andrew Cudden (Daly City), Student Elections Ambassador, Elections Department

Tavio Delgado (Novato), Homework Helpers Intern, South Novato Library

Cameron Ericksen (Kentfield), Homework Helpers Intern, Civic Center Library

Mario Esparza (Dixon) Air Patrol Volunteer, Marin County Sheriff's Office

James Gunn (Novato), Certified Law Student, Public Defender's Office

Maya Hamamjian (Novato), Teen Volunteer, Novato Library

Briana Henry (Pittsburg), Law School Intern, District Attorney's Office

Caitlin Heslin (San Francisco), Certified Law Student, Public Defender's Office

Addie Marsh (San Rafael), Student Elections Ambassador, Elections Department

Susy Miller (San Rafael), Senior Peer Counselor, Health & Human Services (HHS)

Aarav Mudigonda (Tiburon), Homework Helpers Intern, Corte Madera Library

Laura Natkins (Point Reyes Station), Senior Peer Volunteer, HHS

Elizabeth Noel (San Anselmo), Homework Helpers Intern, Fairfax Library

Benjamin Schumann (Murrieta), Student Elections Ambassador, Elections Department

Ellie Silberhorn (Berkeley), Certified Law Student, Public Defender's Office

Ellen Thomas (San Rafael), Marin Center Volunteer, Cultural Services Department

Angel Tovar (Berkeley), California Consortium for Public Health Informatics & Technology, HHS

South Novato Library Celebrates Youth

PHOTO BY CRIS CRIOLLO



Staff members at the South Novato Library recently congratulated three young participants on their anniversaries of service. Webstar **Heidy Ordoñez**, left, and youth ambassador **Joselin Ordoñez**, center, marked one year each. Intern **Sahiti Namburu**, right, has been involved for three years. Community Library Specialist **Héctor García**, pictured in back, said students' involvement is "not just about shelving books—it's about literacy, storytelling, justice, and joy." The staff welcomes students of all ages and backgrounds and promotes the value of multilingual skills. The South Novato branch is in the Hamilton area of Novato.



CARTOON BY JOHN DONAGHUE