

## Why BEC Matters To Me

*By Nikki Schlaishunt, Administrative Director*

When I was eight, I started the Kids Keep America Klean Klub. We met under the lemon tree in my backyard and made anti-litter posters and jewelry from old gum wrappers. Even then, it was clear to me that we are directly linked to the environment: what you do to the earth, you do to yourself and your family and friends.



Through the years, this basic understanding has only become deeper and more focused. In 1994, I graduated with a BA degree in political science, and in 2007, I completed my Masters of Public Administration degree. In between I completed both a paramedic and paralegal certificate. My academic experiences have given me an intellectual understanding of just how we are interconnected—how the breakdown from plastic bottles interacts with my body chemistry; the way that water runs off parking lots instead of pooling to seep back into the groundwater that we rely on for showers and drinking; how media psychologically affects our view of the world; how our world view affects society and how economics interacts with it all.

Growing up, Bidwell Park was a major part of my life. I remember building rock dams in the creek with my sister and cousins. When I was older I would get up before dawn to spend hours riding horses in Upper Park. In high school we would spend all day up at Brown's Hole, and I scolded my friends until they picked up every bit of trash that we brought in, and then some. My physical interactions with nature have given me an intuitive understanding of our interconnection. I learned that nature can soothe a battered soul as well as provide the basics that we all need to live—food, water, air.

My social action work has been rich and varied. Working with a student group, I helped start the recycling program at the University of Cincinnati. I was a volunteer with the Task Force Against Family Violence and helped people to obtain restraining orders and support services. Along with thousands, I marched against the first Gulf War in Washington D.C. and participated in the Hague International Peace Conference in 1999. I have worked as a health care advocate, a case manager for people coming out of homelessness and an early childhood educator. All of this experience has given me an emotional understanding of our interconnection—with each other and with the earth.

The Butte Environmental Council has been protecting and preserving our interconnection with the environment for thirty-four years. BEC stands up for our water as we fight to keep the Tuscan Aquifer flowing for us all. BEC speaks up for our air, attending Butte County Air Quality Management District meetings and working for regulations that will allow us to maintain both our traditions and our air quality. BEC keeps our land clean, organizing and running the annual Bidwell Park and Creeks Cleanups.

This is just a small sample of the work BEC has done and is doing for all of us living in the North Valley. With the help of our members, our donors, our volunteers and our funders, BEC will continue to ensure a healthy, vibrant community and environment for all. This is why BEC matters to me.