

Our Path to Environmental Activism and Beyond

Why we support the Santa Lucia Chapter with our time and money

By Carole and Alex Mintzer



Before we knew each other, we participated in Earth Day events at our respective high schools in California and Michigan. Alex's school held a teach-in and Carole went rippapping as one of many activities offered for students at her school. Neither of us grew up with activist parents or around role models who could show us how to speak up on issues that would affect our lives. Carole's mother, in particular, seemed almost afraid to speak out - not wanting to rock the boat.

So how and why did we become environmental activists? When we began our married life together in 1978, we made choices that were good for both our pocketbook and the environment, with the pocketbook being the main driver. It meant we rode our bicycles or took the bus whenever we could, drove cars that got high gas mileage, combined errands to make just one car trip, bought only what we needed, and kept older items that were functional rather than replacing them for the next new thing. Our choice to not have children was partly because of concerns about overpopulation but also because we didn't feel the driving need to reproduce and raise a child¹.

At the urging of a friend, we joined the Sierra Club in 1986 and for over ten years we paid our dues and occasionally read the newsletter. We went on a Sierra Club trip to the Caribbean in 1994, but we were hardly active members. When we moved to Orange County, California, in 1996, we encountered the challenge of being 40-something-year-old adults needing to find

¹ Despite the misguided beliefs of a certain Vice President-elect, people who don't have children still care very much about the world we live in and leave for the next generation. What a buffoon.

friends in a right-wing conservative area with a large population. Coming from rural Michigan, Carole had never imagined feeling alone while surrounded by so many people, but that's the conundrum of big metropolitan areas. We started attending Sierra Club meetings and found our community.

We cut our teeth on environmental activism by opposing a sprawling 5000-home development proposed for east Orange. We learned to speak at public meetings and work within the Club to file lawsuits - all necessary skills for environmental activists. Over time, both of us took on leadership positions in the Angeles Chapter and Sierra Club California.

After we moved to SLO County in 2020, we reached out to the Santa Lucia Chapter to connect with our new community during the pandemic. Alex became the Chapter's Political Committee Chair and Carole served as Chapter Chair from August 2020 through December 2023.

It's fair to say we have found our volunteer home with the Sierra Club. For some people, that is enough, but we came to recognize that organizations like the Sierra Club cannot function effectively on volunteer strength alone. Volunteers are more effective when they have the support of staff, and so we began making regular donations to Sierra Club California and our local chapter (first the Angeles Chapter and now the Santa Lucia Chapter).

We became life members of the Sierra Club in 1997 and made our first monthly donations in 2011. In more recent years, we included Sierra Club California and the Santa Lucia Chapter in our estate plans. Of course, we expect it to be a long time before either entity benefits from our estate plan, but our commitment has been made. And when we're old enough in a few years, I expect we'll make [Qualified Charitable Distributions](#) from our IRAs to the chapter.

We don't agree with everything Sierra Club does, but we highly value their efforts toward addressing climate change and protecting our environment. Sierra Club political endorsements help our members identify pro-environment candidates because so many decisions that affect our environment are made by elected officials. And of course, many people get their start in the Sierra Club by going on volunteer-led outings. We have made many friends through our involvement with the Club. The camaraderie among volunteers is part of why Sierra Club succeeds.

I hope you will join us in making regular donations to the Santa Lucia Chapter and including the chapter in your estate planning. Go to our [donations page](#) and sign up for monthly donations, or contact [Julia Curtis](#) to learn more about how to include the Santa Lucia Chapter in your estate plans.