The Making of "Capitola – Signs of the Times" by Deborah Osterberg

In March the Capitola Historical Museum premiered its 2023 exhibition "Capitola – Signs of the Times" which traces the history of Capitola through its signage. The inspiration for this exhibition came from several sources. The initial inspiration came from a quote by architectural intern Helen Benbow, who worked for Henry Allen Rispin's architect, George McCrea. Over the past couple of years, the owner of this invaluable collection of correspondence, Teresa Porter of the Benbow Inn in Garberville, has allowed the museum to have scans of these treasures. Former Curator Frank Perry began transcribing the letters and I completed the project last year.

The aspiring young architect often wrote home to her family about the projects she worked on with her mentor. In one letter she described a dilemma facing Mr. McCrea, "Now the great difficulty is signs. Every concessioner wants to hang a banner clear across the street in front of his place etc. And Mr. Rispin doesn't see why it isn't all right. But I think Mr. McCrea will win out."



The title panel just inside the front door introduces the new exhibit and portrays some of the clutter that McRae was referring to in his letter to Helen Benbow.

Sign, sign, everywhere a sign. Blockin' out the scenery, breakin' my mind. Do this, don't do that, can't you read the sign?

~Five Man Electric Band, 1971

This made me think about the sign clutter evident in many photographs of the Esplanade in the period after Rispin went bankrupt and sold off his Capitola holdings. Apparently, Mr. McCrea did not win out regarding signs. Then I thought of how different signs around Capitola look today and realized that an exhibition on signs could be an excellent theme for telling the story of Capitola from its pioneer and resort beginnings to its character today as a popular beach town, artists' colony, and desirable coastal residential community.

After deciding on an exhibition theme, I came up with a title. I thought of "Signs of the Times", only to find out later that my original idea was also the title of the quintessential sign makers

magazine first published in 1906. Oh well, it's still a good title. Next, I identified signs in our museum collection which could best help tell Capitola's story. Then I realized that studying the history of sign making would be an important next step. I located numerous articles on the subject and took extensive notes from the book, Signs, Streets, and Storefronts – A History of Architecture and Graphics Along America's Commercial Corridors, by Martin Treu. Through online research I discovered that there is an American Sign Museum in Cincinnati, Ohio, and checked their website for further inspiration on the meaning and place of signs in our culture. Finally, I located several articles on local sign history through searching newspapers.com.

I reviewed the museum's photograph collections for images of signs from all periods of Capitola's history. The majority of images showed commercial and resort signage and since these are often the most vivid and fondly remembered signs, it seemed logical to concentrate the exhibition upon them. I also wanted to include images of current signs. So, one day Jim Hobbs of the Soquel Pioneers and I went around town taking photographs of iconic Capitola Village signs and local barber shops sporting the traditional barber pole. Thanks to Juliette Thompson, our Museum Board Youth Representative for framing the barber shop photographs as well as helping me dismantle the old exhibition this past winter. There were so many wonderful sign images that I decided to purchase two electronic photo frames so the exhibition would also include continuously running slide shows.

To better understand today's sign making techniques, I visited *Signs by Van* located in Prunedale, where I was given a tour by owner, Phil Vanderkraats. I took photographs of their operations, and they provided me with samples of modern sign making materials which I incorporated into the exhibition. I also contacted Shawn Adams, owner of *Santa Cruz Signs*, who provided me with images of signs he made for Capitola, plus a quote about his personal connection to Capitola.

I divided the exhibition into several categories of signage: Signs by Mother Nature; The ABC's of Signs (the history of sign making); Welcome to Camp Capitola (resort signs from the Hall, Hihn and Rispin eras); Vacancy-No Vacancy (signs of hotels and cottages); Signs of Escape (signs of exotic entertainment venues); Signs on the Move (vehicle signs and billboards); Signs That Sell, Illumination (electric and neon signs); Your Local

Barber Shop; Fill 'Er Up (gas station signage); The City Beautiful (development of sign regulations); Rebirth of the Craftsman (1960s craftsmanship revival to the present); and Sign Making - Then & Now.

I reserved the largest exhibit case to represent Capitola's 1903 Southern Pacific railroad depot since throughout much of the resort's history, the first sign most visitors encountered was the large black and white "Capitola" sign perched upon the depot roof. The depot was a group project. Acting Museum Board President Dave Peyton was sign painter in chief and did a magnificent job of painting the depot in the authentic Southern Pacific colors. Board member Gordon van Zuiden graciously let us make a large print of a 1915 Ole Ravnos photograph showing a huge crowd greeting the incoming train. By the way, the large crowd outside the station was seeing off uniformed members of the Catholic organization, the League of Cross Cadets, whose annual campground site in the early 1900s, was directly across Capitola Avenue from our museum.



Thanks to Andrew Baumhardt and Capitola Museum Board President, Dave Peyton for making the vision become reality by building this exhibit.

Working together on the depot exhibit, Dave and volunteer Andrew Baumhardt built a false wall for the ticket window so that I could recreate the depot's interior. Andrew also placed on loan a set of period currency which I placed along with other artifacts from both our museum collection and some items on loan from my personal collection. Another important element was the authentic Southern Pacific Railroad Station Master's unform which was graciously loaned to us by the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento. Though the uniform dates from the 1950s, the style is not all that different than earlier versions.

There were also several instances of serendipity while creating the exhibition. As I was assembling the railroad depot exhibit, I realized that the 1915 photograph allowed me to connect the scene to the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. Not only was I able to add images of exposition tickets, programs, and posters, but also link the depot exhibit to the fabulous stained-glass windows which adorn the museum's ceiling. The windows, originally part of the Ohio Building at the exposition, were incorporated into the Prospect Avenue, craftsman style home of Al Lent. After a 2009 renovation, the windows were donated to the museum by Jeff and Cathie Thurmond. As the exhibition construction continued, we happily realized that the exhibition could accommodate the large, original "Capitola" depot sign.

Thanks to Niels Kisling, we incorporated the wonderful story of how Bobbo and Janey Larson, who donated the sign, found, and recovered it in the 1970s.

More instances of serendipity included Volunteer Steve



Preserving History with a Grass Roots Approach

In the 1970s, Capitola residents Bobbo and Janey Larson were walking home one night when they came upon a railroad depot sign laying in the street at the foot of McCormick Avenue.

Janey said, "Oh my, that's a really cool, old sign." Bobbo replied, "Yeah, that sign should not just be laying in the street. Someone might steal it."

Janey replied, "You're right. We better take it before it gets stolen."

The Capitola Railroad Depot sign spent the next 20 years in their backyard until Janey began volunteering for the Capitola Museum. Understanding the historical significance, she gave it to Curator, Carolyn Swift, so that future museum visitors could enjoy it for generations to come.

Thank you, Bobbo and Janey, for providing a future for our past.

Bobbo and Janey lived in Capitola until the late-1990s when they sailed their boat to New Zealand. Bobbo was part of the 'original eight' that raced aboard the local sailboat. MERUIN, in the 1977 Transpac. Merlin set a record from LA to Honolulus—a record that stood for 20 years! Their son, Morgan, lives in Hood River, Oregon. Morgan is a professional sailor and has provided a good living for his family through sailing.

Kayser, who brought in an old Capitola street sign he found still remained at Capitola's Public Works department. This



allowed us to provide an exhibit on why Capitola's street signs are so unique and colorful. Steve also enhanced the Fill 'Er Up exhibit case by doing research on the 1914 license plate on loan from Niels Kisling. Steve uncovered that the license was issued to H.A. Bowers of Soquel for his Model "T" touring car. To finish off the exhibit case, Frank Perry loaned several vintage auto tools.

Another instance of serendipity occurred before work began on the exhibition. One weekday this past winter, I heard a knock at the museum door. Two visitors from Idaho asked if they could see the museum, so I

welcomed them in. Our conversation got around to my plans

for centering the next exhibition on the theme of signs. Turned out the gentleman was Ken Sievert, son of local sign maker Leo Sievert. Sievert made many large advertising signs for Capitola's famed Hawaiian Gardens nightclub. A few years ago, Ken Sievert donated some of his father's artwork and former Curator Frank



Perry did an exhibition on Sievert. That fortuitous meeting led Ken Sievert to loan us his father's sign making tools and lettering books as well as photographs and advertisements.

There are several exceptional large signs in the exhibition including a "Camp Capitola" sign. Former Curator Carolyn Swift believes it dates from at least the 1890s or earlier, since after that date Hihn stopped using the "Camp" designation and began calling his resort simply, Capitola. Thanks go out to Frank Perry for helping us create a secure exhibit mount for this special artifact. Another wonderful large sign is the beautifully hand carved sign for the Bandstand Restaurant by local artist Gerry Geyer in 1970. Geyer donated the sign to the museum in 2007. And thanks to Niels Kisling for his research

on the Bandstand Restaurant history. Getting these large signs out of storage and to the museum took some heavy lifting by Dave Peyton and Volunteer Patrick White. Getting the signs, securely and safety mounted could not have been done without the help of Capitola's Public Works department. We also received great assistance from City of Capitola employees Heather Haggerty (computer issues) and Sean Sesanto (sign regulations).

The exhibition, which took contributions from many, will continue through the end of December. The admission free museum is open every Friday through Sunday from noon until 4:00 p.m.

Welcome Juliette Thompson

By Dave Peyton



The Capitola Museum Board of Trustees' newest youth representative, Juliette Thompson is no stranger to giving back to her community. As a sophomore who is currently home schooling, Juliette recently joined the museum board and has become a tireless volunteer who regularly assists Curator Deborah Osterberg with behindthe-scenes documentation of archival

material, helps host informational forums and county-wide historical gatherings, and greets museum visitors. Beyond the museum, Juliette volunteers with the youth ministry at Twin Lakes Church and she is especially proud of her support of the Homeless Garden Project.

Juliette arrived in our area from the Virginia suburbs not far from Washington DC in 2021 and immediately fell in love with the mild weather and friendly people. She has two older sisters, who attend college in New York, a house with two cats (Shamrock and Mercedes), and a golden retriever (Eloise). Mom and dad provide transportation to various museum functions as well as a variety of extracurricular activities that include volleyball, church programs, and onehanded choreographed sword fighting at a European martial arts center in San Jose. Though she had limited surfing opportunities while living on the East Coast, Juliette has quickly taken to surfing and currently favors the Capitola break.

Archeology has become Juliette's primary educational focus and was the driving force that propelled her to become a volunteer at the Capitola Museum. She gained a keen interest in the people and history of the past after visiting an Egyptian museum and attending an archeology camp. Juliette wishes to pursue educational opportunities at Oxford University in the United Kingdom after last year's visit to England and Scotland where she became enthralled with the British Museum, and its focus on ancient history and archeology.

Blue Plaque — Mark Your Place in History By Niels Kisling

There are 15 Blue Plaque properties in Capitola and many more throughout Santa Cruz County. The Santa Cruz Historical Society started the program in 1973. Since then, the Museum of Art and History (MAH) has taken it over.

A Blue Plaque is an honor, and it does not bind or restrict a property owner in any way. Anyone who enjoys a home or property with historical roots is welcome to apply to MAH. Please go to their website and/or contact Marla Novo for details about your application.

https://www.santacruzmah.org/blog/blue-plaques-historiclandmarks-of-2021

About the Blue Plaque program, Marla says. "This is the kind of plaque you want. You may have noticed blue plaques on some of the structures around Santa Cruz County. That's part of the MAH's Historic Landmark program. By adding a blue plaque to a home, business, or other structure in our county, this longstanding MAH program shines a light on the people that lived in them, preserving pieces of Santa Cruz County history. "Blue Plaques" are awarded each year to structures that have architectural or historic significance throughout the county. A group of volunteers, who are historians, meet quarterly to review applications. This year we've awarded five plaques."

I went a little bit further with mine and had Bay Photo create

a companion to the Blue Plaque on my home. I noticed over the years that people would stop, House moved in 1950 read my plaque, and begin y Shadowbrook founder **Brad Macdonald** SANTA CHUZ MUSEUM OF ART & IN asking each other questions. I knew people would appreciate

knowing more of the story.

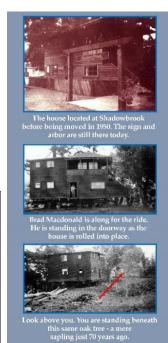
We have not added any new Blue Plaques in Capitola for over a decade. With our rich history dating back to the mid-1800s, our town could become the Blue Plaque Capital of Santa Cruz County.

Let's get busy.



Scan this QR Code to download the FREE Capitola Walking tour.





Out with the old, In with the new

After more than 10 years of service, Capitola Museum Board President, Niels Kisling, left the board January 1. Kisling is still involved with museum activities—if you are reading this, there's your proof.



Of his departure, Niels says, "I didn't quit Capitola, and I didn't quit the museum. I remain committed as ever to seeing the museum do well. I'm taking a break because my ideas and creative energy as a board member are not needed at this time. I'll be back."

Meet Roger WyantBy Deborah Osterberg

Roger Wyant joined the Museum Board of Trustees in February 2023. He became involved with the Capitola Historical Museum because of his interest in preserving the

stories of the past. As a high school junior back in 1980, Roger developed a greater interest in history when one of his teachers invited the students to have their older family members come to class and share their life stories. Roger feels strongly that "It is important to preserve this history while it is here."



Roger is originally from San Mateo County, where his family has deep roots. After graduating from Pescadero High School, Roger went on to study crop science at Cal State Fresno, and fruit science at North Carolina State University. He came to Capitola in 1997 due to his work in the Watsonville strawberry industry.

His father's family came to California during the Gold Rush in 1849 before settling in San Mateo County. His mother's family settled in the town of Harrison—which is now known as Loma Mar—in 1868. His great grandfather, Arthur Blomquist, who was born in San Mateo County, worked in the family's lumber business. The family operated a shingle mill, harvested tanbark for leather works in Redwood City, and even provided the fuel wood for the fog horn at Pigeon Point Lighthouse.

It is little wonder that Roger enjoys collecting artifacts related to local agriculture and logging. His collection includes an oxen yoke and a two man saw which, for good reason, was referred to as a misery whip. Roger also loves to garden and graft fruit trees. He is a member of the Monterey Bay Chapter of the California Rare Fruit Growers. The group, which helps preserve old varieties of fruits, is the largest amateur fruit growing organization in the world, boasting members on every continent except Antarctica.

Roger also loves going to the beach for Capitola's beloved summer concerts, but he and his family are disappointed that they will, like many of us, miss out on

spending time on Capitola Wharf this year. Roger is looking forward to getting things back to the way they were before this winter's storms and before Covid.

Though his favorite museum in the country is the Henry Ford Museum in Michigan, he enjoys visiting small town museums whenever he can. Roger says the Capitola Historical Museum is a valuable resource for this community and he wants to help raise its profile by getting more folks in this region to visit the museum and become involved as volunteers.

Another great local connection for Roger is that in 2019, his family purchased and began restoring the c. 1887 Henry Van Syckle, located at 202 Cherry Avenue. They have made improvements to the plumbing and recently removed the old carpet and restored the original redwood floors. This year they hope to repaint the exterior with the present color scheme. We can't wait to see the finished project.

The Capitola Museum currently has one opening on the board. For information contact The City of Capitola or follow this link: https://www.cityofcapitola.org/hmb/page/historical-museum-board

Meet Enrique Dolmo Jr.

By Emmy Mitchell-Lynn

The Capitola Historical Museum welcomes our new member, Enrique Dolmo Jr. to Board of Trustees. Enrique has been a dedicated member of the Capitola community for the last 12 years and believes he lives in the best city in the world.

For the last 9 years, he has worked at New Brighton Middle School in numerous roles, including Athletic Director, Campus Supervisor, Transportation Operator and Head

Coach. He was recently elected CSEA Union President where he reworked labor contracts, secured better working conditions and terms for their members, as well as played an integral part of securing the largest raise in union history.



He is a natural leader; "I

lead with a positive attitude and infectious optimism." He is sure to bring that same positive energy and fresh outlook to the Museum Board.

Enrique has a passion for community improvement through education, especially when it comes to our youth. A father of two, he focused his career path so it allowed him to be more involved in his children's education. Enrique said he wants to support Capitola's youth with more youth programs.

Understanding our history is a key steppingstone in envisioning and creating a better future for our community. With a focus on maximizing progress, taking initiatives to provide pathways to bright futures for our youth, and making improvements that will benefit our community for generations to come, there's no better place for Enrique to align his intentions than by joining the Board of the Capitola Museum.

Capitola Museum Loses a Dear Friend By Niels Kisling

The world lost Frank Hill on March 10, 2023. He was 93.



Frank was a huge fan of the Capitola Museum and always a willing contributor. He generously donated many things to the museum including the streetcar cutout, the Capitola Coloring Book, dozens of artistic works including a retro Caribbean Ballroom poster created for the *Just Beachy* exhibit.

He created the "Take a Peek" cartoon girl who invites people passing by to stop and 'take a peek' at the beach cottage. Hollie, the beach cottage cartoon girl, features a likeness of Frank Hill's daughter Hollie who died in 2008. A parent should never have to bury their child.



A lot of the work that Frank donated to the Capitola Museum was coordinated by long-time museum volunteer, and best friend, Paul Parsons. Frank and Paul's friendship goes back to their middle school days at Mission Hill. The fast-friends went on to become the first two dishwashers for Shadowbrook—Frank would always say he was the first one hired; and so would Paul. There's a rumor that they knew how to appropriate liquor from the storeroom without opening the locked door. Frank once told me, "Paul's arms were very long, but they were only long enough to reach the scotch. We didn't like scotch, but those bottles were the only ones Paul could reach."

Franks son Troy says of his father, "My dad knew he was going to be a cartoonist by age 9. Not only did he accomplish that, but he did it very successfully with a prolific career that spanned decades."





Image on the left: Frank Perry (left), Frank Hill (middle), and Troy Hill enjoy each other's company at our volunteer appreciation bar-b-que on Memorial Day in 2019, recognizing the contributions made by all volunteers of the Capitola Museum. Image on the right: Troy and Frank Hill in 2019.

After graduating from the Academy of Art in San Francisco, Frank the student, became Frank the instructor at the Academy. He went on to work his entire life as an illustrator and a cartoonist contributing to many syndicated cartoons including *The Flintstones, Bugs Bunny, Yogi Bear, Pink Panther, Felix the Cat* and many others.

Frank had his own syndicated cartoon called *Short Ribs*. He took over this cartoon after creator Frank O'Neal retired in 1973. Frank Hill's *Short Ribs* appeared in thousands of newspapers around the world for the next eight years.

Hill was associated with Hal Ketchum for over 30 years providing scripts and drawings for the *Dennis the Menace* cartoon series. Frank also worked with Charles Shultz illustrating children's books and developing merchandising products to support the popular *Peanuts* cartoon and its cast of characters.

Back in 1985, Frank was at the Soquel Post Office where the postmistress knew him well. On a handshake, she hired him to decorate the walls above the post boxes. He had no deadline to meet and no artistic restriction—it was a dream job for this cartoonist/illustrator.

One of his favorite murals was Charley Parkhurst driving the stagecoach. After Charley died, it was discovered that he was a she. In 1868, because of Charley's biological secret, she became the first female registered to vote in California. There is a plaque at the Soquel Fire Station stating that she was the first woman to vote in the United States. Frank honored 'One-Eyed Charley' by painting a mural of him driving his signature stagecoach. Parkhurst had deep, local roots and he is buried in Watsonville. His grave includes a plaque created and placed by the Pajaro Valley Historical Society.





Steve Swift (left) and Paul Parsons (middle) helped save the Soquel Post Office murals created by Frank Hill in 1985. IMAGES BY LINDA SMITH

The post office was decommissioned, and the murals were saved by the contractor doing the work. John Nicol and Linda Smith arranged to get them, and the Capitola Museum has Frank Hill's Soquel Post Office Murals in their collections today.

Frank Hill served his country in the US Navy. During the Korean War he was a Tin Can Sailor and was later re-stationed in San Diego to work for the military newspaper *Stars and Stripes*.

Troy and his sister, Debra, lost their dad on March 10 and the Capitola Museum lost a very generous contributor and friend.



Frank Hill and his son Troy recently refurbished the Capitola Museum cartoon cutout. Hundreds of visitors, young and old, pose with it each year bringing smiles and walking away with a lasting souvenir.

Presidential Tribute – Niels Kisling

By Dave Peyton

It wasn't long after becoming a museum volunteer that I met Niels Kisling. He was a museum volunteer for many years before becoming Board President. I didn't know him well and I didn't know that we would become fast friends. I came to see him as a remarkable character during a summertime twilight concert at Esplanade Park. As concert attendees began the 7:PM ritual of donning sweaters and coats as a brisk breeze pushed the expected fog into the village and the temperature dropped into the 50s, Niels remained in shorts and a T-shirt and his indifference to the cold and wind drew my attention.

I commented on his absence of another layer of clothing, as nearly everyone there that evening had a second layer wrapped around their waist or over their shoulder. Niels gave a somewhat cavalier answer, "I'm impervious to the cold." Seeing my raised eyebrows, he followed with a throwaway, "I'll tell you all about it." I marveled at his toughness and returned to the concert in my warm second layer.

When I got home, I found an email from Niels with newspaper clippings of the remarkable story of why he was undaunted by the cold. His story was about survival. In a nutshell, he was the sole survivor of a sailboat race accident that claimed the lives of his two sailing companions when he was 16 years old.

Soaked and freezing cold, and not expecting to survive, Niels accepted his fate and waited. Almost 24 hours later, he was

seen by a passing ship that rescued him. He was returned to Richmond and reunited with family and friends. Thus began his journey as a survivor and community historian. A remnant of the fated sailboat washed up on the beach near Ragged Point. Niels found that remnant 22 years later, and it holds a prominent place in his home next to photos of his current sailboat, *Geronimo*.



An assortment of major and minor ailments has not slowed Niels' dedication to discovering and showcasing the rich history of Capitola. His home is a "museum" featuring a display of the relocation of his historic house near Shadowbrook Restaurant, relics from the earliest days of the indigenous people, and items from the more recent past.

Though he left the museum board of trustees, stepping down from his role as Board President, he remains an active volunteer, creating the museum's newsletter, helping and training new volunteers and always seeking information and tales that tell the amazing stories of Capitola. His self-made museum business cards list him as a "Cultural Relic", and though he's not really an old relic, he is a remarkable character. The museum is fortunate that he continues to volunteer, providing insight and guidance.

Conservation & Preservation - In November 2022, a small exhibition of Olaf Palm paintings was placed in the Capitola City Council Chambers. In the mid-1960s artist Olaf Palm came to Capitola and by 1967 he and his wife Eva established a gallery in the Village (located where the shoe store Hot Feet now stands). Palm's gallery helped initiate a change in Capitola, launching its transformation into an art colony. Five of Palm's paintings make up the exhibition which will continue throughout 2023. Art Conservator Robert Watson performed conservation treatment on two of the paintings by removing lacquer stains.

Mr. Watson also framed Ann Thiermann's painting, "The First People of Capitola." The painting, depicting Native people in this region before European contact, now hangs in the Capitola City Council Chambers. During the 2023 Exhibition Reception in March, Miss Thiermann provided remarks about her creative process and the importance of an image of local Native people now permanently displayed in the City Council Chambers.

To date three Frank Hill wall murals have been framed by Mr. Watson, and a fourth is currently at his studio.

The Capitola Museum has recently received generous donations from:

Toni Alldredge Peter A. Canepa
Calvin Brady Cornwell Robert T. Deacon
Ann Everett Rickey Feldner
Craig and Mimi French Lani Hall
Susan B. Lynn Cynthia Matthew

Susan B. LynnCynthia MatthewsBonnie MeyerRichard W. NutterMolly OrdingDavid A. PeytonYvonne Zannis & Demian ThierinianBarbara Reding

Santa Cruz County Association Realtors (for a history talk)

Marilyn Hyde (The Harold Hyde Family in the memory of Stan Stevens)
Michael P. McDonald (in the name of Sean Patrick McDonald)
Newcomers Club of Santa Cruz County (for a history talk)
Jerry and Robyn Walters (in the memory of Stan and Carli Stevens)

Read about Stan Stevens life and legacy at:

 $\frac{https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/santacruzsentinel/name/stanley-stevens-obituary?id=37020293}{}$

Recent Museum Donations:

- -The museum received a photograph album of Camp McQuaide images from Cecilia Riddell
- -A 2002 Brown Bulb Ranch catalog from Pat Saunders.
- -A large collection of Santa Cruz County postcards from Norman Davis -Niels Kisling donated a drive with scanned and digitized files of all Norman Davis postcards





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Board of Trustees: Enrique Dolmo, Dave Peyton, Mary Hay, Emmy Mitchell-Lynn, Gordon van Zuiden and

Roger Wyant

Youth Board Member: Juliette Thompson