

Ann Newman Joins Hill Country Alliance Board of Directors

Organizing neighbors to conserve the land comes naturally for Newman

As a new board member with Hill Country Alliance, Ann Newman plans to use her neighborhood organizing skills to bring land owners together to conserve the land.

The Newmans' primary home is in San Antonio, where they raised their two daughters, Olivia, 19, who is a freshman at Vanderbilt College; and Juliana, 16, in boarding school at The Lawrenceville School in New Jersey.

As part of her contribution to the San Antonio community, Newman worked to help start KSTX89.1FM, the first National Public Radio affiliate in San Antonio. She has been involved with Texas Public Radio for two decades. Newman first worked as a volunteer at pledge drives. She served on the board for seven years and served as board chair for two years. She and her husband, Chico, continue to support the station today.

In 1995, the Newmans purchased land in the Hill Country. Working with Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) experts, they have been instrumental in bringing neighbors together in their community near the Lost Maples State Natural Area in Vanderpool to conserve this area known as the Bandera Canyon Lands.

Organizing the Bandera Canyon Lands community all started with the need to prevent feral hogs from destroying wildlife habitat in the area. The Newmans decided to invite neighbors over to discuss the problem. "We sent out an invitation for lunch and a meeting, and 80 people showed up," Newman says. They discussed forming an association and decided to hire a full-time trapper to manage the feral hogs on the land.

The potluck gathering brought up other conservation issues such as protecting the beautiful, clear, abundant springs in the area. As interest grew, the neighborhood formed the Bandera Canyon Lands Alliance (BCA). EDF's Beyrl Armstrong, naturalist, and David Wolf, biologist, provided expertise and credibility for the group. They established a 501(c)3 non-profit organization last year. "We have decided to stay a loose neighborhood organization," Newman says. The alliance has about 50 members. They host a speaker twice a year to help educate the group on issues such as riparian areas, cedar management and oak wilt.

One of the functions of the BCA is to be prepared for future issues as they arise. "I think of our group as being in the reserves," Newman says. "If we needed to mobilize, we could." The alliance is staying on top of issues like plant and animal conservation, and pressing water issues.

Newman says she is thrilled to be invited to serve as a Hill Country Alliance board member. One of the things she wants to do with HCA is to encourage other landowners in the Hill Country to form associations using the model created by the Bandera Canyon Lands Alliance. “We would like to create a roadmap for how to do this, and see all the 17 Hill Country counties have landowner-based groups.”

The Hill Country Alliance is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to raise public awareness and build community support around the need to preserve the natural resources and heritage of the Central Texas Hill Country. To learn more about Hill Country Alliance initiatives, please visit the HCA website (www.hillcountryalliance.org).