



## Engaging Senior Citizen Participants

Lucien Sonder and Carlo Arreglo from San Francisco Maritime Historical National Park through their First Saturday programs have been successful in attracting a loyal group of participants over 65 years of age. Part of this success is their partnership with the SF Senior Center, where their First Saturday walks are regularly advertised. First Saturday programs are just one of many programs that San Francisco Maritime Historical National Park and the SF Senior Center collaborate together on—for many seniors also serve as docents within the park’s Maritime Museum as well.

The other part of their success is due to their partnership with the Bay Bandits Volksmarch club, a walking organization that originated in Europe and has grown to have chapters throughout the US and other countries. Through this partnership in exchange for letting the Bay Bandits advertise their self-guided walks at the museum, they in turn help to promote the park’s First Saturday walks among their members. This partnership has resulted in the participation of many senior citizens.

When figuring out how to tailor and refine their First Saturday programs, for both Sonder and Arreglo it was a process of trial and error. Lucien spoke of how “over the past year, our park’s DOI-VISTA volunteer, Carlo Arreglo, and I experimented with program formats to see if we could build audiences”. Sonder goes further to state:

“We have established a program model for our HPHP walks that we internally refer to as ‘More Walk, Less Talk’—as we are first and foremost interpretive rangers, we love to talk about history. We realized that we can’t make as many stops on HPHP programs as we do on a normal walking tour, since the primary goal of the HPHP programming is to get the group moving and active. So we have tried to keep our talking stops to a maximum of three, and to include long distances of uninterrupted walking in between. So the main ingredient of our programs is walking, but we do mix a little bit of history and interpretation into the recipe—this seems to get us our sweetest results.

The duo have been so effective in their strategy of mixing walking with small aspects of history and interpretation that participants have even faithfully attended their programs in the pouring rain. Lucien exclaims:

“I was shocked when a big group showed up to attend our ‘Fire, Walk With Me’ program last March. During this walk, we passed by locations of catastrophic fires from the time period during the city’s infancy after the Gold Rush, and after the 1906 earthquake. We had 18 people walk with us in the pouring rain for more than three miles, starting from Aquatic Park, through Chinatown, and ending at the Old Mint, at 5th and Mission! We also got our largest turnout (25 people) for another walk during Super Bowl weekend. I was sure that the competing events elsewhere in the city would draw away from our audience, but in fact, it added to it!”

It is through her First Saturday program that Sonder has noticed quite a few positive changes in participants. Many have grown to become friends and look forward to attending the monthly program together. For Lucien, "I have also personally enjoyed getting to know the participants and sharing conversations about so many different topics as we walk through the park, along the trails, and streets of San Francisco". In addition to the gaining of new friendships, many of her regular participants have even begun to truly internalize the many health benefits of nature. This is occurring so much so, that as Sonder notes, "a few participants have emailed me newspaper articles about the health benefits of walking outdoors, so that I know they are reflecting on the benefits themselves, and how excited they are to spread the word of the HPHP outdoor exercise 'gospel'". For more information on First Saturday walks with Lucien Sonder and San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park please visit the program calendar.