

# The Great Tide Pool

## TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA

by local award-winning author, Brad Herzog

### PRICELESS IN PG

January 15, 2026



My favorite observation about volunteers is this: "Volunteers don't get paid, not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless." Pacific Grove is buoyed by such people – locals who essentially vote every day (regarding the kind of community they hope to live in)... simply by doing.

They are docents at Point Pinos Lighthouse, field trip volunteers at the Museum of Natural History, horticulturists helping to keep the museum's Native Plant Garden blooming, landscape volunteers at the Monarch Butterfly Sanctuary, even counters who track the population of the winged wonders. They are the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary's Bay Net volunteers who teach giddy observers about the harbor seals during pupping season at Hopkins beach while making sure the mothers and pups remain undisturbed.



They are members of the PG Public Library Friends and Foundation, including the good people who assist the library by collecting used books from 10 am to noon Monday through Friday at St. Mary's by-the-Sea Episcopal Church. They are Chamber Ambassadors (who act as a liaison between members and the Chamber of Commerce) and blue-blazered PG Youth Ambassadors (who support local nonprofits and businesses while gaining valuable experience in everything from speaking to organizing). They are PG high school students who well surpass a community service graduation requirement by working with the Animal Friends Rescue Project or the St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Store or the Canterbury Woods senior center.

And they are cleaner-uppers – whether that means picking up litter amid the blooming pink at Perkins Park or trash collection at Asilomar State Beach – who donate their time to keep a paradise pristine. Of course, as one observer once put it, "Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart."

Which brings me to a trio of ladies who represent the enduring possibilities of volunteering – three chronic cleaner-uppers. A few years ago, the Monterey County Weekly published a feature article about PG residents Lynn Mason, Susan Pierszalowski, and Lila Selden. The story celebrated the trio's three-plus decades of scouring Pacific Grove's coastline, beautifying by collecting.

Their day jobs were Clark Kent-ish – an art researcher, a school nurse, a speech-language pathologist. But most mornings during their daily walk – over the course of some 10,000 mornings if my math is correct – one or two or all three of them could be found donning their capes (well actually, neon vests once they became official PG volunteers). The superhero task they gave themselves: using gloves and grabbers, meticulously clean up the refuse that would otherwise litter Pacific Grove's Rec Trail.

The amount collected is actually astonishing, a reminder that it takes significant effort to maintain the lasting beauty of America's Last Hometown. Among their finds: beer cans and liquor bottles, leftover food, used tissues, even diapers. And countless plastic bags.

Equally amazing: their recordkeeping. Mason actually tracked their totals in a small notebook. At one point, she recorded a weekly average of some 500 to 800 cigarette butts collected along the one-mile stretch of trail from Hopkins Marine Station to Lovers Point. That's tens of thousands per year. Concerned about the trend, the three friends brought several large, clear plastic bags filled with their evidence to a PG city council meeting. The eventual result: In January 2020, Pacific Grove became the first city in Monterey County to become a "smoke-free city," banning smoking in public outdoor spaces. It was a victory for all those who love to inhale only the crisp, clean air of a sanctuary by the sea.

So the next time you walk along the rocky coastline and marvel at the natural beauty that graces Pacific Grove – or enjoy the assistance of volunteers at various community events and cultural opportunities – remember to thank the folks who offer service and get paid in smiles.