



GUALALA COMMUNITY CENTER

Serve. Support. Celebrate.

Volunteer Corner

December 2025
Darla Buechner

Deep Roots in Gualala

Darla was born in Fort Bragg at the hospital that is now the Grey Whale Inn and was raised in Gualala by her mother, Betts Cook, and her father, Clinton Reynolds, a third-generation resident of Gualala. Clinton's great-grandfather, Otto Rueter, a baker, emigrated from Germany to San Francisco and later settled in Gualala on Fish Rock Road. Darla's maternal grandparents, the Cooks, moved from Oregon to Gualala, where they raised five children.

Darla's paternal grandfather, Earl Vance Reynolds, was a carpenter and a "faller" who worked in the forests. He lived at Log Cabin Ranch, located beyond the Little North Fork of the Gualala River. The ranch was owned by Fred and Vada Russian, who also operated a boys' camp there. The property was eventually purchased and incorporated into the Gualala Redwoods logging holdings. Darla fondly remembers Fred and Vada, who later left an inheritance to Darla and her brother—funds Darla would eventually use as collateral to buy out her parents' partners in the Pirate's Cove Drive-In when she was just sixteen years old.

A Family Shaped by Hard Work and Learning

Darla often recalls a memorable story about her grandmother, Virginia Reynolds, who once deeply embarrassed her son, Phil, by enrolling at Point Arena High School at the same time he was a student there. Not stopping there, Virginia went on to college and later became a teacher at Point Arena Elementary School—an achievement that ultimately made her son very proud. Darla's paternal uncle, Phil Reynolds, still lives in the family home on Old Stage Road.

Darla's father worked as a logger, while her mother was a homemaker. As their three children grew older, Betts became a teacher's aide in her mother-in-law's classroom at Point Arena Elementary School.



Darla lost her father to esophageal cancer when he was just 52 years old and she was in her mid-twenties. She remembers his funeral at the Community Baptist Church being so well attended that the windows were open and people stood outside to pay their respects. Darla's mother now lives in Oregon. Her younger brother, Vance, recently retired as foreman for R.C. Buechner Construction and lives in Mariposa, while her younger sister, Dena Smith, lives in Yreka.

Growing Up on the Coast

Darla has many fond memories of growing up in Gualala. She and her family often visited an old homestead called Elk Prairie, where they picked apples, blackberries, and pears that her mother turned into jam, applesauce, and pies. Darla remembers a small herd of horses there and always trying to get close enough to pet them.

Later, Elk Prairie became part of Gualala Redwoods, and families were required to obtain an annual pass to gather fruit and firewood. One of Darla's favorite memories is of her mother finishing housework, planning dinner, and loading up Darla, her siblings, and neighborhood children for a day of swimming at North Fork. Lunches were packed, and the group would stay all day until Darla's father passed by hauling logs, stopping to wave and say hello. Darla later joked that her mother's ulterior motive was likely to "wear out" the kids so they'd go to bed early.

Early Responsibility and a Strong Work Ethic

Darla began attending Point Arena Elementary School at age four and graduated from Point Arena High School at seventeen. At sixteen, she used part of her inheritance to purchase an ownership stake in the family business, Pirate's Cove Drive-In in Point Arena. She attended school for part of the day and then worked in what had become "her" restaurant.

After running the restaurant for about ten years, Darla briefly worked for ICO before joining Surf Market, where she worked for her aunt Marcy and uncle Frank Cook.



In her mid-thirties, Darla began a 20½-year career with The Sea Ranch Association. Working alongside Community Manager Jerry Gonce for approximately fifteen years, she rose through the ranks to become Administrative Assistant to both the Community Manager and the Board of Directors.

Building a Life and Family in Gualala

While working at The Sea Ranch, Darla met Bob Buechner. She fondly recalls one of their first dates at the Sea Ranch golf course, laughing that she wasn't sure who was trying to impress whom.

Bob moved to Gualala in 1981, following his mother and siblings, and has never looked back. A general contractor since 1999, Bob and Darla married in June 2001 and adopted their daughter, Shayla, six months later. Shayla's daughter, Charlotte Cissna, now brings great joy to her grandparents, Darla and Bob.

Creativity, Craft, and Passing It On

Darla is a highly creative person with exceptional skills in quilting, pine needle basket weaving, and cooking and baking. Her daughter, Shayla, benefited from her mother's talents and has become an accomplished baker herself, creating wedding and special occasion cakes.

Giving Back to the Community

Following her retirement, Darla devoted more time to volunteer service. She served twice as President of the Gualala Community Center Board of Directors and also served as President of the Pacific Community Charter School Board. Today, Darla continues to take crafting classes, prepare special meals for family and friends, spend cherished time with her granddaughter, volunteer at the Pay 'n' Take clothing store, and serve as Vice President of the Gualala Community Center Board of Directors.

A Legacy of Service

Darla Buechner is a fourth-generation Gualala native and a true credit to her family and her community. We are deeply grateful for all she has done—and continues to do—to make Gualala a better place for everyone.