

## VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT

By Michele Hunter



When most of us think of Saturday mornings, we think of sleeping in, time with the family over a big breakfast, running errands, and relaxing. Not so with three special individuals who have dedicated their Saturday mornings to volunteer at PMMC. Each Saturday morning, these three people have left their comfortable warm beds to volunteer at the Center. Their dedication has included taking care of the animals, scrubbing pens, tube feeding hundreds of animals, doing mountains of laundry, weighing out fish and ensuring all our patients have the best care. **Gio Chiarella, Katherine Laag and Kim Lewis** are those three devoted individuals that are the mainstay on Saturdays!

Gio started in 1998 smack in the middle of El Nino when we encountered flooding, mudslides and over 90 animals in-house at one time. Thankfully, that didn't scare him away. Katherine signed on in 2000 and Kim in 2001. Being a tight-knit group, they have shared many experiences both good and bad, and together they have formed a strong bond. Like brothers and sisters, they pick on one another, laugh at each other and compliment each others strengths and weaknesses.

When they all started out at the Center, they were young and single. I have watched them all grow personally and in their careers. Gio is married and has a one-year old daughter, Lola. He runs an ambulance company and his expertise as a paramedic is invaluable. He has helped us tremendously in conducting various tests on animals. His company also helps sponsor many of our fundraisers.

Katherine is an elementary school teacher. Katherine also has a one-year old daughter. Her husband cares for their daughter Hannah while Katherine looks forward to spending "her time" taking care of the animals.

Kim is also married and convinced her husband, Jason, to help occasionally when the shift needed an extra body. Jason soon signed on as a regular volunteer and it is hard to remember Saturday mornings without the duo.

Working side by side for so many years, they all work together like a well oiled machine. This especially helps when they are on a rescue or working with animals in an urgent situation. One can give the other "the look" and they know exactly what to do to help out.

The three have helped train countless numbers of new volunteers and each does an excellent job of sharing their experiences and passion for pinnipeds with our visitors.

I feel privileged that they continue to dedicate their Saturday mornings to PMMC. Thank you!



Gio Chiarella



Katherine Laag



Kim Lewis

