

**Olmsted Award Remarks – John W. Foster  
May 20, 2008**

Thank you Director Coleman, and all my co-workers. I feel a little like Milli-Vanilli today, accepting an award for something I didn't do because Archaeology and Cultural Resource work is not done alone. It's the product of a team effort, and that's what you're recognizing today. I'd especially like to thank my friends in the AHM Division who work very hard to preserve the state's heritage resources in CSP. My loving thanks to wife Kathy who has supported me for so many years while I was off leading expeditions or having visions!! And my brother Dan, who also caught the archaeology bug at an early age. I maybe kinda gave it to him!!

For me today's a bit of harmonic convergence. I grew up in Palos Verdes in LA, a community designed by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. in 1927, the same time his firm was delivering the State Park System Plan we still reference today. So I'm doubly honored to receive this award.

State Parks has been my focus for 33 years now and in spite of its nits we occasionally pick, Parks been a great place to work. For someone who grew up hunting arrowheads and chasing after fossils, I managed to stumble into a great career. Most kids flirt with archaeology about the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and then

grow up to get a real job. For me, the growing up part never really happened, but that fascination with ancient history always remained. I'm very grateful that State Parks came to my rescue. Where else can someone interested in heritage resources intersect with the lives of Julia Morgan, a shaman who painted the last surviving image at Chumash Painted Cave, Bob Hope, the Grateful Dead, John Marshall, Marshall South, Guglielmo Marconi, José Panto, Pio Pico, Annie Bidwell, Marguerite Wildenhain and Will Rogers? Who else would try to manage such a diverse heritage inventory as shore whaling stations, missions, ancient fish traps, shipwrecks, Pelton wheels, Russian outposts, gold-rush orchards, Placer, hardrock and hydraulic mines, sacred peaks and waterfalls, lighthouses, gold-rush towns, historic landscapes, and the bones of a flightless scoter deposited in a Santa Cruz shellheap laid down when the pyramids at Giza were being built?

Well, I'll tell you – nobody else would even try!!

When I started at Parks many years ago my mentor was the first state archaeologist, Fritz Riddell. He gave me a simple charge: go out and “ride herd” on the cultural resources of the state park system. I've tried to do that over the years and although I mostly ride an office burro these days, I still have the same enthusiasm that Fritz inspired in me years ago.

A Parks career has given me many opportunities. As the state's Underwater Archaeologist, I've been able to extend parks and preservation to the underwater realm in California. I've been called on to assist in establishing parks and preserves to protect rock art, shipwrecks and archaeological sites in other countries. I've chased evidence of Columbus, Francis Drake and Capt. William Kidd, the pirate. (Some might say my park ops experience gave me special insight into piracy!!) Condors, galleons, mounds, gold-rush ships, Chinese anchorstones, stone fish traps and painted caves have lured me from the office.

We're here today because we believe in the value of parks in our society. We also believe that people deserve a past...a past whose touchstones are well preserved and adequately interpreted. To that end, I'm especially proud and very honored to receive the Olmsted award today.