

## Catalina Island Conservancy's NatureWorks Program Prepares Local Youth for Future Employment

By Laura Mecoy,

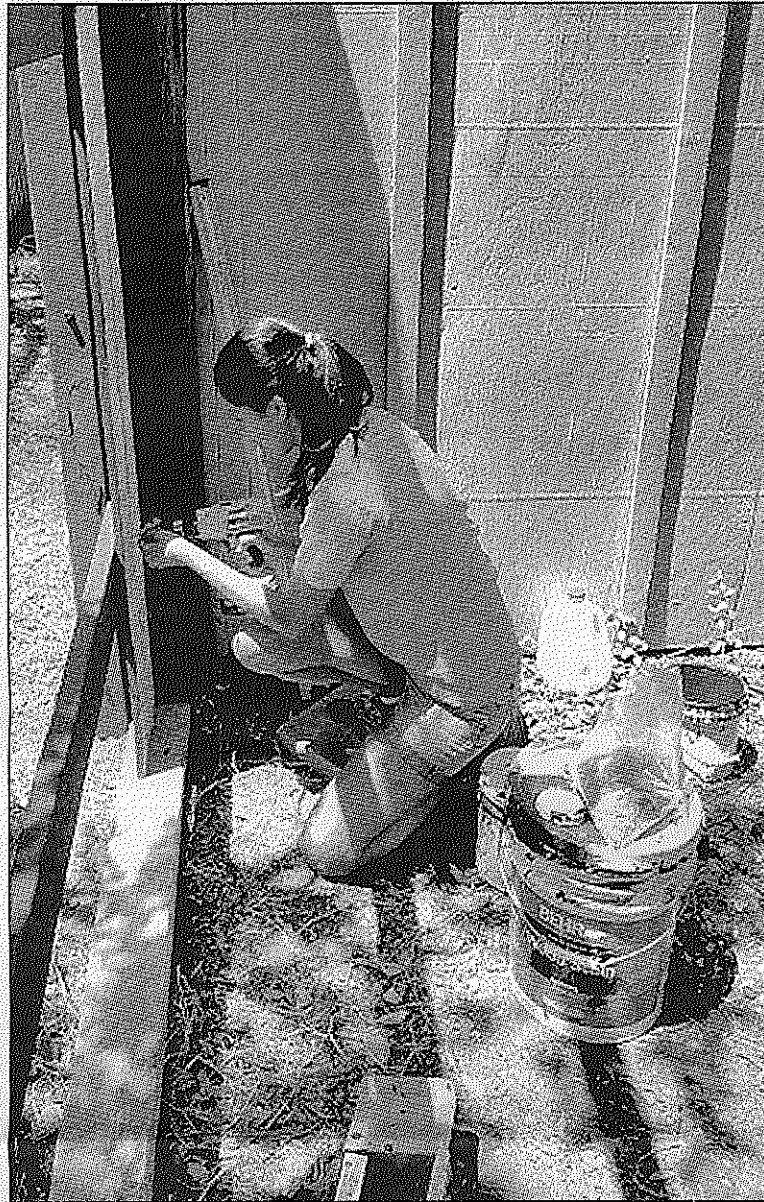
At the age of 18, Blanca Alvarez had lived on Catalina her entire life and believed she knew the Island well. Then she was introduced to NatureWorks, the Catalina Island Conservancy's educational program, and she discovered there was much more to learn about the very special place she calls home.

"I saw so many places I had never seen and learned so many things I didn't know," she said.

NatureWorks is an innovative partnership with Avalon School that expanded the Conservancy's kindergarten through middle school educational programs into an integrated program that extends through 12th grade.

NatureWorks connects strong academics to field experiences on Catalina so that students can see for themselves how they could work in ecotourism or other jobs related to conservation. It is also a strong partnership with the school district's Linked Learning Program, which is designed to make learning exciting, challenging and relevant to students.

NatureWorks is building a model for how school systems and conservation organizations can collaborate to expand environmental stewardship training and Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) education, with a particular focus on underserved youth. In previous years, for instance, the curriculum focused on drought and water conservation on the Island, including an in-depth



Blanca Alvarez gets a hands-on lesson through the Catalina Island Conservancy's NatureWorks program. Photo courtesy of the Catalina Island Conservancy

look at desalination, a source of water for Catalina.

The Conservancy and Avalon School partnered in the "Nature-

Works Job Shadow Week," a unique opportunity for Blanca and 43 other high school seniors to focus on job preparedness in 2015

by spending two days following professionals from local businesses.

While other students spent their days in the offices of the Catalina Island Chamber of Commerce, U.S. Bank or one of the other businesses in Avalon, Blanca and some of her classmates headed to the wildlands to learn about working for the Conservancy.

They spent two days with Conservancy conservation and mapping staff members, learning about the Island's geology, native plants, biology and mapping tools and techniques. They helped perform maintenance work on a weather station, and they asked lots of questions about educational and personal requirements for each position.

The high school seniors then delivered presentations about their shadowing experiences to the younger students, educating them to the professional possibilities on the Island. Eight of the students who participated in the job shadowing program received job offers from their shadowing assignments. Blanca signed up for a Rose Ellen Gardner Internship with the Conservancy and spent the summer of 2015 learning more about the Conservancy's important work and her Island home.

"Job shadowing gave me insight into what people do and what

kind of person you have to be to do that," she said. "I wasn't really sure what I was going to do. But after working with the Conservancy, I know I want to work in the environmental field."

About the Conservancy: Formed in 1972, the Catalina Island Conservancy is one of California's oldest land trusts. Its mission is to be a responsible steward of its lands through a balance of conservation, education and recreation. Through its ongoing efforts, the Conservancy protects the magnificent natural and cultural heritage of Santa Catalina Island, stewarding approximately 42,000 acres of land and more than 60 miles of rugged shoreline. It provides an airport and 50 miles of biking and nearly 150 miles of hiking opportunities within its road and trail system. The Conservancy conducts educational outreach through two nature centers, its Wrigley Memorial & Botanic Garden and guided experiences in the Island's rugged interior. Twenty miles from the mainland, the Island is a treasure trove of historical and archaeological sites. It also contains numerous rare and endangered animals and plants. The Island is home to 60 species – and counting – that are found only on Catalina. For additional information, please visit [www.catalinaconservancy.org](http://www.catalinaconservancy.org).

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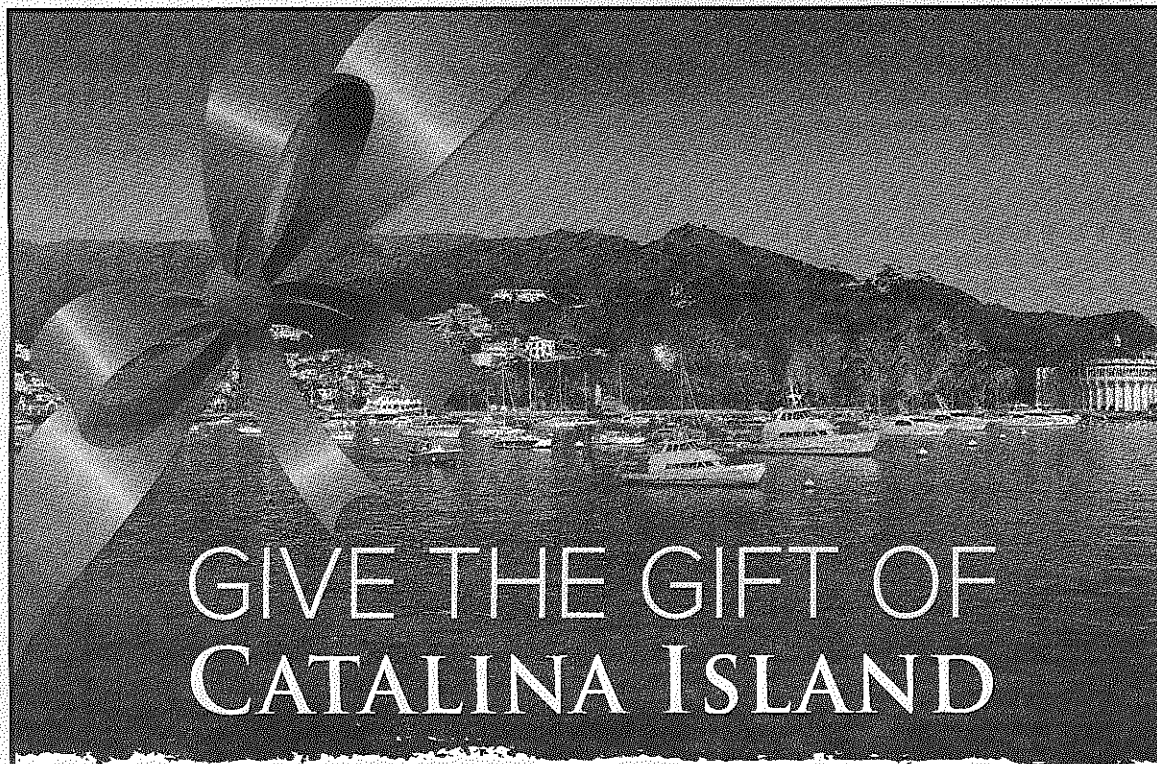
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