

A chat with our new leader, Ryan Spencer

July 2023

It was my privilege to listen to Ryan Spencer, first CCCA executive director, pause and reflect after his early months. My request was for Ryan to share from early experiences as one who has “waded vigorously into the waters of Comal County and taken a few deep dives” in this new venture.

Ryan reports that for him the “most exciting” part of our CCCA work is the growing number of people participating in community programs, usually held the second Tuesday in odd numbered months. Alongside this engagement he underscores the efforts of CCCA volunteers who reach out to curious inquirers attracted to “Keep Comal Wild!” He observes that old-timers and newcomers share an understanding that our communities and economies depend on the incredible natural systems we have as precious legacy. Through the growth of settlers into Texas, our Texas Hill Country and locally our springs and rivers have drawn many, particularly in the most recent decades.

“These volunteers amplify our impact and make working for CCCA an incredible experience.”

When I observed that the rocky terrain of the region as it extends upward on the Edwards Escarpment serves as a metaphor for the decision-making and policy development required to achieve CCCA objectives he quickly replied, “Oh, yes!” Then in characteristic Ryan fashion he pointed to his many get acquainted conversations that underscore for him the shared values to “Keep Comal Wild!” Going further he explained that his approach is simple: “bring people together, highlight our shared appreciation for nature and work together to identify appropriate mechanisms that ensure these resources and treasures are available for our kids and grandkids.” Certainly, you can understand why there are interested neighbors ready to join with the CCCA Board in building effective team efforts with his energetic and informed guidance. He emphasizes time and again how the common idea of taking care of what you’ve been given and leaving it impressively enhanced gets reflected all over Comal County. That becomes an

animating engine for building and shaping a caring future. One such illustration Ryan used was the urging that we reconnect our young with nature. He observed that the average American child spends less than seven – yes, that’s seven – minutes a day engaged in unstructured nature play and activities. Indeed, he points out that this has to change if we want our kids to be happy, healthy and strong. Placing that alongside the efforts to expand trails, parks and conserved legacy acreage, it is a keen vision.

When I observed that the CCCA Board and partners are excited for his beginning efforts he noted that he has stepped into an effort that has been welcoming for the challenges and transitions ahead. He wants to be a “weaver” of conservation efforts across a wide range of community groups, neighborhoods, and civic organizations, strengthening our voice with a view toward the future that helps “Keep Comal Wild!” When I sought to congratulate him that he and spouse Katie are becoming first time homeowners just north of Canyon Lake, he responded “we are gratefully entering this dream of ours and looking forward to being a force for good with our neighbors!”

A Spanish expression I found helpfully expansive is to pursue “encuentro” which is descriptive of a meeting with consequences that builds ties between persons. I find Ryan to be such a builder and weaver!

Join us by 6 p.m. at McKenna Center to hear from Annalisa Peace about our “Open Space Challenges and Opportunities.” (More at comalconservation.org.)