

 [PRINT THIS PAGE](#)

Noozhawk Talks: As a Champion for Foster Youth, Meredith Scott Is More Than a Match

http://www.noozhawk.com/noozhawk/article/012212_noozhawk_talks_meredith_scott/

By Leslie Dinaberg, Noozhawk Contributing Writer | [@lesliedinaberg](#)



Meredith Scott found herself drawn toward working on behalf of foster youth, initially, through Assistance League of Santa Barbara and now with The Children's Project Academy. "It was a population that I really had no experience with," she says. "It was heartbreaking because they hadn't done anything to be in this awful situation." (Garrett Geyer / Noozhawk photo)

A simple shopping trip ignited a former teacher's compassion to provide children with stability and opportunity in a world without it

It's hard to beat the sunset view from a booth at the [Harbor Restaurant](#) on Santa Barbara's [Stearns Wharf](#), but you'll find it even sweeter if you indulge in the cheesecake.

They don't advertise it, but all of the cheesecakes at the Harbor and [Longboard's Grill](#) upstairs, as well as those at neighborhood favorites [Harry's Plaza Café](#) and the [Tee-Off Restaurant & Lounge](#), are homemade by one of Santa Barbara's busiest philanthropists: Meredith Scott.

It's not just her recipe. She actually makes the cheesecakes at home every week.

Scott laughs when I marvel at how much work that must be.

"Tuesday is my baking day; that's when I stay home and bake," she explained. "It's fun. I've been doing it a long time and it's kind of mindless work. It's not that bad!"

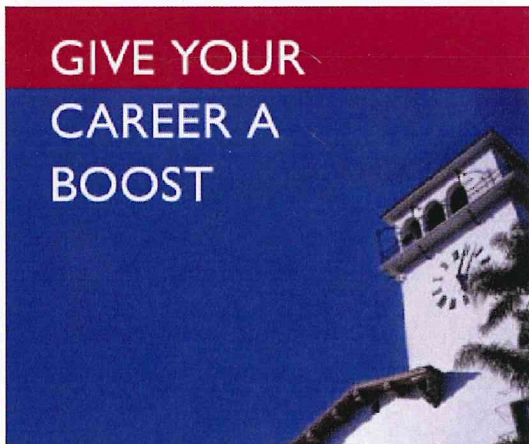
When she's not busy baking, Scott — a former [Vieja Valley School](#) teacher who with her husband, John, owns all of the aforementioned restaurants, plus [El Paseo](#) — is a tireless community volunteer. Her special passion is working on behalf of disadvantaged children.

Scott's longest-standing nonprofit involvement is with [CALM \(Child Abuse Listening & Mediation\)](#), which helps provide happier, healthier lives for those suffering from the devastation of child abuse.

"When I first stopped teaching I got involved with CALM," Scott said. "That was my first entrance to that world and that was because in my years of teaching I had to call [Child Protective Services](#) twice for kids."

That was 18 years ago.

She's still active with CALM, which is preparing for the [26th Annual Celebrity Author's Luncheon](#) on March 10. Eight years ago, she joined [Assistance League of Santa Barbara](#) and got involved with the [Teen School Bell program](#), which was her introduction to the foster care system.



"We took teenagers shopping for clothes," she recalled. "I took this one girl shopping, she was about to turn 18 and she had never been shopping before. I had to show her how to go through the racks of clothes and how to pick things to try on. She didn't know what size she was.

"It was just a really powerful experience for me," said Scott, choking up at the memory.

"I took another young girl shopping who was starting 12th grade and she was real excited to be a senior," she continued. "This was her fifth high school that she was going to be going to!"

Getting such glimpses of life as a foster youth was sobering for Scott.

"When I was an elementary school teacher, I saw how hard it was sometimes for kids from divorced families just going back and forth from mom and dad who were both loving parents," she said. "And then you meet these kids who are in sometimes 12, 15, 17 different homes throughout their childhood. It's heartbreaking. There is no stability."

It was this awareness that drew her to become involved with [The Children's Project Foundation](#), which is working to build a [residential charter school](#) for foster teens in Santa Barbara County. Scott now serves on the board.

"With The Children's Project Academy, they would start in seventh grade and have some stability in their life," she said. "If they are in foster care they are in lots of different homes, so it's harder. It was a population that I really had no experience with and hadn't heard any of those stories before. It was heartbreaking because they hadn't done anything to be in this awful situation."

The academy, to be built on land already purchased in Los Alamos, is basically ready to go.

"All we need is money, money, money," said Scott. "It's good to put things out there in the community because, hopefully, it will touch somebody's heart. You never what's going to touch somebody's heart."

Clearly, children in the foster system have touched hers.

With them in mind, Scott is spearheading Mock City, an ambitious new project that will take place in the spring at the Assistance League. Mock City will bring together a variety of services, experts and volunteers to teach teenagers in foster care about important, practical subjects, including apartment rentals, banking, budgeting and credit counseling, dealing with the courts and the legal system, vocational schools and higher education opportunities, scholarships, going to the grocery store, signing up for utilities and much more.

Scott serves on the advisory board of [Casa Pacifica Centers for Children & Families](#) in Camarillo and Mock City is modeled after one of its programs called "The Road to Independence."

"I loved the idea and it's a natural for Assistance League because they have the Fostering Friends Program that's already in place," she said. "You need lots and lots of volunteers for Mock City ... and right off the bat 60 women signed up to help without any prompting."

The format will be similar to a fair or a trade show, with an orientation at the beginning and incentives for youths to gather lots of information.

"Some of the students will be randomly given a baby (an egg like the high school project), so if they have a baby they have to make sure it goes to day care and is taken care of," Scott said. "Everybody is given a time to have a job interview and they have to show up. So, say 3 o'clock is your job interview, and if you have a baby you have to make sure somebody is taking care of your baby."

The kids will have dinner while they're at the Assistance League campus and will be eligible for incentive prizes. Donations are welcome, as are additional volunteers.

As a former teacher and the mother to Kelly (age 34, who owns the popular women's clothing store [Miss Behavin'](#) at 6551 Trigo Road in Isla Vista) and Jordan (age 30, who works with his father John in the restaurant business), Scott has a lot of compassion for children who have not been given the same opportunities in life.

"I feel so lucky to live in Santa Barbara and have my family right here," she said. "I still call my own parents for advice even now and can't imagine what it would be like not to have that support."

Scott grew up in the San Fernando Valley, attended [Cal State Northridge](#) and later got her teaching credential at [UCSB](#). She met her husband working in a restaurant and they lived in Las Vegas, Arizona and Ventura before settling in Santa Barbara when their children were young.

When she's not volunteering — and baking — she can be found accompanying her daughter on buying trips for Miss Behavin', doing Pilates, hanging out with friends and family, or reading for the two book clubs to which she belongs. She's also helping with the online marketing of the family restaurants.

"At the Harbor, we're going to be starting a locals-only menu with special deals just for locals," she said.

After more than 25 years here, Scott said she definitely feels like a local.

"I seriously love it here," she said. "I'm so glad this is where we ended up."

F.Y.I.

» Mock City will be held April 14 at the Assistance League of Santa Barbara, 1249 Veronica Springs Road. For more information or to volunteer or donate to the project, email Scott at mscott421@aol.com.

» CALM's 26th Annual Celebrity Author's Luncheon will be held March 10 at [Fess Parker's DoubleTree Resort](#), 633 E. Cabrillo Blvd. [Click here for more information](#).

— [Noozhawk](#) contributing writer *Leslie Dinaberg* can be reached at leslie@lesliedinaberg.com. Follow her on Twitter: [@LeslieDinaberg](#).

http://www.noozhawk.com/noozhawk/article/012212_noozhawk_talks_meredith_scott/