



Marin residents building strong friendships through Twitter

By Jessica Bernstein-Wax
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Tweetups, the gatherings where Twitter users meet up in real life, are often associated with networking or building business connections.

But in Marin a group of avid Twitterers has formed intense friendships through Tweetups — friendships that in some cases have become closer than "real life" connections.

"I always joke that my Twitter fans actually know me better than my family because they actually pay attention to what I'm doing all day," said Sally Kuhlman, a Mill Valley resident who has been organizing Marin Tweetups since June 2009. "It's definitely a way to make friends, and we all feel the same. Before this, we had friends, but we feel like we have actual friends we can rely on now. People we can call when we are sick or in an emergency."

Twitter is the popular online social networking service that allows users to send out messages of 140 characters or fewer and "follow" each other's posts. The updates are called tweets.

Kuhlman, who previously worked in marketing and social media and tweets under the handle @Sally_K, said she originally started using Twitter in 2007 and wanted to organize a Tweetup then. But few Marin residents were using the social network at

the time, she said.

"I didn't know anyone in Marin on Twitter yet and everyone just ignored me," Kuhlman said, noting that a Tweetup wasn't possible "until a critical mass hit Twitter, and there were a lot of Marin people on there."

That moment came

in 2009 when Kuhlman again put out feelers, and San Rafael resident Peggy Butler (@pobutler) replied that she was interested.

In the two-and-a-half years since, the group has organized dozens of Tweetups throughout Marin and friendships and business relationships have blossomed. Between 20 and 40 people generally show up and ages can range from 20 to 80, Kuhlman said.

About 45 Twitterers — a record turnout — attended a Tweetup Butler organized last week at Wipeout Bar & Grill in the Bon Air Center in Greenbrae.

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media," Butler said. "Usually the same core group is there and then we often get extra (people). ... Just about every time we get to meet somebody new."

Making new friends in Marin can be challenging, and Twitter provides new opportunities for broadening social circles, she said.

"I'm mostly a stay-at-home mom and I make friends through my kids mostly," Butler said. "(Twitter) has opened up a whole other world for me. ... By the time you meet somebody that you've been chatting with online you already know a little bit about them — almost always you hit it off in person."

Point Reyes resident Cate Olds (@c8nhogarth) agreed, saying, "Point Reyes, I've been there for 30-something years, so it's kind of neat to meet new people.

"People in West Marin hate to tweet — I don't know why," she added with a laugh.

San Rafael police Lt. Dan Fink (@SanRafaelPolice) said he has been on Twitter since March 2009 and has attended five or six Tweetups. Some of Fink's Twitter friends have even signed up for the department's citizen police academy after getting to know him at Tweetups.

"I love coming to these — it's just fun to be here," Fink said at the Wipeout event, as he and Lt. Raffaello Pata (@pata326), chatted with fellow Twitterers.

Some Marin business owners have also benefitted from the events.

Nancy Duran, co-owner of Appliance Techs of Marin (@ATOMsanRafael) said several Twitter friends have come to her when their appliances broke — and just being active on the network has improved the company's name recognition and community connections.

"They'll leave you a direct message and tweet you, 'Hey, my washing machine's making funny noises,'" Duran said. "Honestly I think in Marin we are probably the only appliance repair company on Twitter."

"It's definitely a great way to connect with people," said Nicki Simmons, the marketing coordinator for Wipeout Bar & Grill.

"We loved it," Simmons said of the Wipeout Tweetup. "There was so much fun energy in there (and) a new crowd of people that don't always come in to Wipeout."

Meanwhile, the Marin Twitter group has become so close that it recently organized a club to discuss books from Marin authors on Twitter.



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"Since getting on Twitter back in the spring, I have met there more people in Marin County than I have met in the previous eight years I've lived here," Woodacre resident Tamara Holland (@tamholland) wrote in a recent blog post. "They are a raucous, kind, smart, active group of folk who support others' causes, activities, businesses, and who meet up with each other IRL ("in real life") individually and in groups ALL THE TIME. "Seriously. Like, my calendar is completely full."

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MARIN TWEETUP

- The next Marin Tweetup will be at Gioia Boutique, 706 San Anselmo Ave. in San Anselmo, from 6 to 8 p.m. Dec. 2.
- For information on future Tweetups, go to <http://sallyaroundthebay.kontribune.com/>.



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