



Photo credit: Scott Van Osdol

BRIGID SHEA

Travis County Commissioner
Precinct 2 2015 - Present

“

[The passage of the 1992, citizen-initiated Save Our Springs Ordinance] is Austin’s great David and Goliath story and should be passed on to our children and all newcomers as a story of great importance and one that must be preserved.”

The most important part of my work to protect Barton Springs and Barton Creek happened before I took office. I had the privilege to help form and head up the SOS coalition. Many brilliant and creative people helped start the coalition because Barton Springs was threatened. One of them became my husband, John Umphress. When the council refused to protect the Springs, we decided that the people of Austin would.

In the fall of 1991 we initiated the SOS ordinance to limit pollution and development in the watershed for the springs. We galvanized thousands of volunteers across the city who all loved Barton Springs. They collected over 40,000 signatures on a petition to put the SOS Ordinance on the ballot. We campaigned for over a year, funded with small change collected at music clubs, at the springs, through mailings and at block parties. We also got a few large contributions, including one from Don Henley of the Eagles.

We were up against the company that owned the world’s largest gold mine, Freeport McMoRan, which was pushing for lax rules to develop a massive community in the watershed for Barton Springs. We were also up against most of the Austin “establishment”- the banks, developers, construction companies, and everyone who benefited from development. A few brave

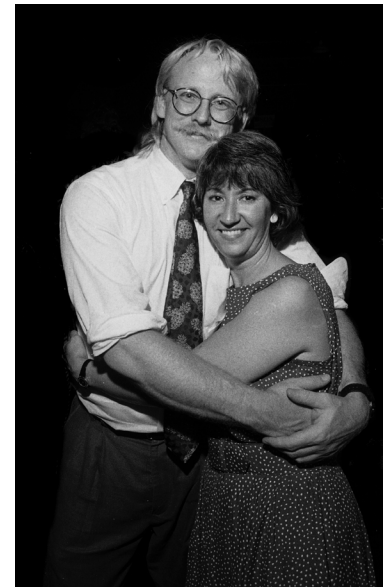


Photo credit: Alan Pogue

leaders stood up and did a TV commercial for SOS, including the former CEO of Dell computers, Lee Walker, the founder of the Associated Republicans of Texas, Julian Zimmerman, and the former head of the LCRA board, John Scanlan.

While the other side played many tricks and succeeded in delaying the SOS election for three months, we ultimately won. In August 1992, the SOS Ordinance passed by a crushing two-thirds margin. At that time, it was the largest turnout for an off-cycle election in the city’s history. It is Austin’s great David and Goliath story and should be passed on to our children and all newcomers as a story of great importance and one that must be preserved. I believe the SOS Ordinance is the reason we can still swim in Barton Springs’ rare and beautiful waters. It is proof of Margaret Mead’s great quote: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.”

