

BEACHCOMBER

Muir Beach Neighborhood News

Issue 237 May 2007

Barbecue Countdown

This overgrown meadow of tall spring grasses and winter debris is the site of the 35th Annual BBQ. Stop by any Saturday in May and help ready the grounds for the fire department's annual fundraiser. Free lunch! For details on the May Work Parties and volunteering for a BBQ committee, turn to page 8.

Photograph by Julie Smith



Photograph by Julie Smith

MBVFD T-shirts make great gifts. Shop at the T-shirt booth on BBQ Day, May 27th. Story on page 10.

Photograph By Bryce Browning



Support your volunteer fire department. Buy and sell BBQ raffle tickets. See story, page 9.

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FROM THE EDITOR

In Appreciation

The *Beachcomber* salutes Heather Kobrin for her graphic design work on the newsletter in 2006 and early 2007. She took the *Beachcomber* to a whole new level with her professional layouts and artistic designs. Many thanks, Heather, and best wishes to you.

Dear Reader:

Are you a subscriber to the *Beachcomber*? Did you pay for this issue? If not, kindly renew your subscription by sending a check (delivered \$25; mailed \$30) payable to the *Beachcomber* to Ann Browning, 20 Cove Lane, Muir Beach, CA 94965, 415.383.2359, or drop in her mailbox across from Pelican Inn. Due to increased production costs, the *Beachcomber* cannot carry unpaid subscribers indefinitely.

Next issue: July 2007

Submissions deadline: June 11, 2007

See page 46 for Submissions Guidelines.

Email: lcgibbs@aol.com

Drop: Beachcomber mailbox, south end of Mailbox Row

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30 Sunset Way, Muir Beach, CA 94965 • 415.381.2515

Letters to the Editor

The *Beachcomber* welcomes your letters. Address to lcgibbs@aol.com with Letters to the Editor in subject line.

Support Those Who Support Us

Dee Turman, graphic designer, who is providing this 48-page issue without charge. Thank you for your wonderful designs and your volunteer spirit, Dee.

D

Turman

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Many thanks to our printer, **Mill Valley Services**, for contributing the 4-color covers. Thank you, Dave Semling.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Fresh-Baked Bread from Green Gulch Farm

By Mick Sopko

Green Gulch Farm has recently expanded its kitchen area and will shortly be able to increase its bread production, both for Green Gulch resident and guest consumption as well as for the possible interest of the Muir Beach community. We'll be continuing to supply bread to the Muir Beach subscribers who receive our growing-season's weekly box of veggies (which starts up again in July). But we'll soon also have the ability to produce enough bread for weekly Sunday sales at Green Gulch (like we used to do). And if there's some interest in Muir Beach for fresh daily bread we'd like to figure out how we can make that happen too!

I'm currently managing our bread-baking activity. I was baking full-time for the community in the mid-nineties and subsequently held other Green Gulch positions, including for the last four years, co-director. My interest in bread-baking, however, has never waned, and I'm committed to increasing my understanding of artisan-style techniques and providing slow-rising, naturally-leavened, fresh and flavorful products.

Muir Beach CSD Meetings to be Held Bimonthly

At the last CSD meeting, the Board voted on and approved a motion that meetings of the Board of Directors of the Muir Beach Community Services District (CSD) will henceforth be held on a bimonthly basis, meaning once every two months for the foreseeable future. Meetings are generally held on the 4th Wednesday of a month, starting at 7 pm, although that could change due to scheduling contingencies. The exact date of a meeting will always be posted on Community Bulletin Boards 72 hours in advance.

A meeting could be scheduled for any given month if the need arises. Occasionally, from time to time we may have a guest (such as Supervisor Kinsey or Superintendent O'Neill) and additional publicity will be provided to ensure that everyone hears about it in advance. Of course, CSD Meetings are open to the public (except for rare cases of closed sessions) and everyone is invited to attend, although we cannot guarantee that it will be more entertaining than your favorite TV show or even a good book.

-Maury Ostroff

Thanks to a grant from a generous donor, we were recently able to implement a dedicated baking area with space and equipment appropriate for small production and teaching activities.

We'll probably be ready to go this summer. If you have some interest in getting fresh bread from Green Gulch and/or have some good ideas about an easy way to make that happen, please let me know. Because of the narrow, funky road into the valley, for example, it'd probably be unwise to encourage too much traffic down here. But we may be able to make a weekly run or runs to a central drop-off point in Muir Beach.

If you'd like to express your interest in this project or have any questions or ideas, please write to me at mick.sopko@sfzc.org. (Or call, 354-0423.) I'd like to hear from you by June 1st in order to help us make our final plans and announce the startup and details in the July *Beachcomber*. Thanks in advance for your participation!

The Beachcomber Announces BBQ Photo Contest

Enter the first annual *Beachcomber* BBQ Photo Contest and win a customized *Beachcomber* Beach Towel (value \$30). The winning photo will be published in the July issue.

Snap pictures of life at the 35th Annual BBQ on May 27th and submit one photo on a disk in .jpg format. Place in 30 Sunset mailbox across from Pelican. Submissions without .jpg extension format will not be considered.

Contest photo due: June 11, 2007

Include your name, email address, and phone number.

Happy shooting!

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

WELCOME JAXSON GIUSEPPE SWARD!!



JES SWARD (OF JOHN-JOHN & KATHY) AND ANGIE BANDUCCI (OF AMADEO AND PHYLLIS) ARE PROUD TO PRESENT THE NEWEST MEMBER TO MUIR BEACH! INTRODUCING JACKSON GIUSEPPE SWARD, BORN MARCH 5, 2007 AT 621 AM, WEIGHING IN AT 6 LBS EVEN AND EQUIPPED WITH HIS OWN FLIPPERS! HE CAN'T WAIT TO MEET ALL HIS WONDERFUL NEIGHBORS! HE HAS ALREADY BROUGHT US MORE JOY THAN WE EVER THOUGHT IMAGINABLE!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

April 2007: Real Estate Tidbits from Debra Allen, Realtor (415) 380-6137



San Diego garden gate from Debra Allen's Doors and Houses collection. Photograph by Debra Allen

Buyers report that they enjoy seeing the blooming heather, but don't enjoy the fog, the roads, and the rising costs of construction materials should they buy a house that needs repair. Many fellow real estate agents still tell me that they believe Muir Beach is just a vacation destination and are relieved to find out that it really does only take 15 minutes to get here from downtown Mill Valley!

Sellers tell me that Muir Beach prices are too cheap (I agree, for this location, Muir Beach is the deal of the millennium). But I've noticed that buyers offer what they want to pay and it's rarely the full list price. Some sellers are in no hurry to sell, and let their homes stay on the market for a long time. Some buyers are willing to wait until a home's list price gets reduced or believe that the longer it stays on the market the lower they can offer. In the end, buyers and sellers work together to find the sale price of each home, and the agent is the messenger.

Homes for sale can go on MLS, have for sale signs, have open houses and ads or can just sell quietly. Each home will have a different need, as selling is matchmaking assisted by the listing agent. Some sellers hold out for who they think will be best, not necessarily who has the highest offer. I've sold

Muir Beach homes in one day or it's taken longer than a year. Homes next door to each other can be different in price by a million dollars (or more); Muir Beach is a very unique place! Some Muir Beach homeowners pour unlimited amounts of money into their properties, and I think they are right to do so.

Refinance appraisals, advice from friends, advice from agents outside of Marin and sale prices of other Muir Beach homes often have little to do with your home's value. Value at Muir Beach is determined by many things (and not really by sq. footage or bedroom count either); and your presale inspections can figure in to that number. Rely on licensed professionals with experience, disclose everything (even if it's bad news or something that's been fixed), and work closely with your listing agent to find the right list price for your home (the right list price is a price that brings in written offers). Remember that listing agents cannot predict a home's sale price! Pacific Union has a list of licensed home and pest inspectors and Marin County real estate attorneys, if you need them. Muir Beach sellers often get seller's remorse, so don't try to sell if you really don't want to. And most important: Enjoy Muir Beach!

Buddha's Birthday Pageant

Sunday, May 6 (rehearsals April 27, 28, May 5)

In the tradition of village theater, we reenact, on Green Gulch's front lawn, the story of the birth of the Buddha, employing masks, music, and dance. The pageant begins at 11:30 a.m. with the pouring of sweet tea over the baby Buddha. Events for children begin at 9:15 and 10:00 a.m. Script by Muir Beach resident Norman Fischer; masks by Annie Hallat. Please bring a picnic lunch and then join us for birthday cake and tea. \$10-30 donation requested per family. Call 383-3134 for more info.

Edges and EXPANSION

Paintings by Rachel von Garnier

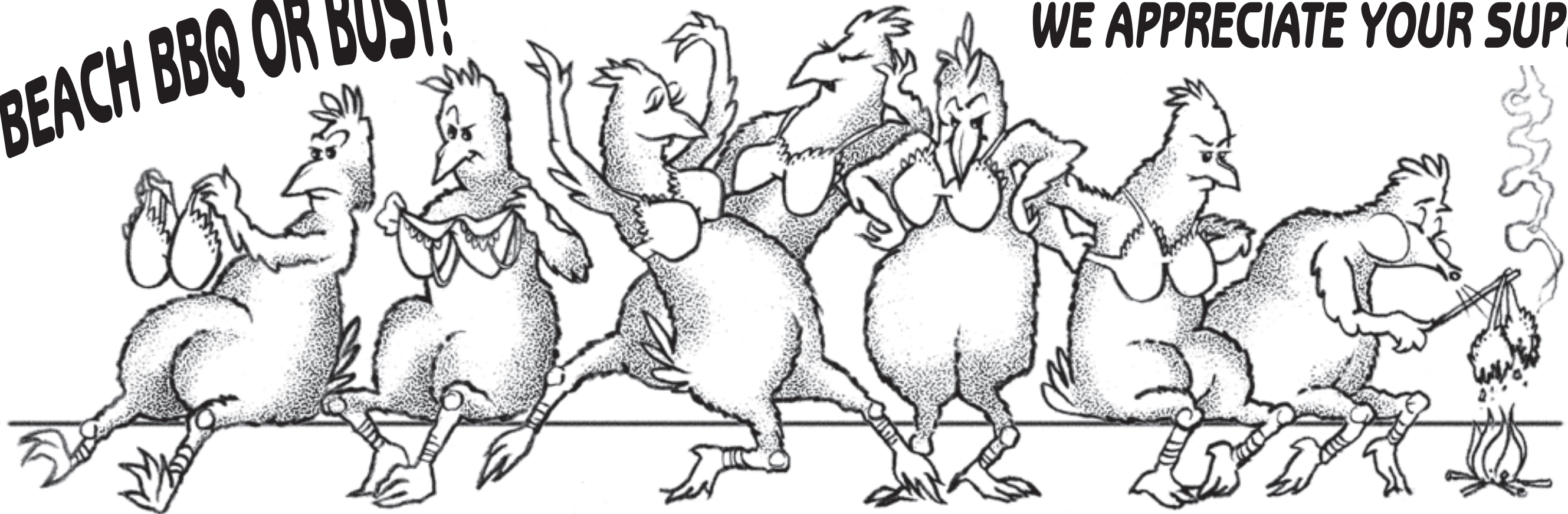
April – June 2007

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Saturday, March 31st
5-7pm

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SUNDAY MAY 27th 2007

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VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

SPONSORED BY THE MUIR BEACH VOLUNTEER FIREMEN'S ASSOCIATION



Barbecue Minus 26 Days

By Anne Jeschke

Preparations for the Muir Beach Memorial Day Barbecue are gearing up. The numerous committee heads are gathering their volunteers and their supplies. The barbecue is a fundraiser for our Muir Beach Volunteer Fire Department, and represents our support of the hardworking and unpaid fire department that we count on in time of emergency. Virtually half of the money used by the fire department last year came from the barbecue and raffle.

The barbecue is a major community event, as well - a time when all residents come together, work together, play together, eat together. If you want to meet more of your neighbors, then you want to volunteer at the barbecue. If you want to see old friends that you've not seen in a while, come to the barbecue. If you just want to have a good time with community friends, this is where you want to be.

We Need You at the Work Parties!

Come to the picnic grounds on Muir Woods road.

Work for a few hours or all day.
Lunch and drinks provided.
Bring gloves and equipment.
Children and dogs welcome.

- May 5 General cleanup: 10 AM - 4 PM
- May 12 Carpentry projects: 10 AM - 4 PM
You don't have to be a carpenter to help!
- May 19 Carpentry projects: 10 AM - 4 PM
You don't have to be a carpenter to help!
- May 26 Final cleanup and chores: 10 AM - 4 PM

Prior to the actual event, there are three important ways for each resident to help. First are the raffle tickets. You can donate goods or services for the raffle by calling Debra Allen at 380-6137. And you can sell (or buy) the raffle tickets that Deb leaves in your mailbox. This is a big profit maker for the barbecue, with nearly all the work done by Deb. It is a real gift to the community. Get your raffle stubs and money back to Deb within days of receiving them in your mailbox! And call her to order more! As always, there are great prizes and tons of them.

Secondly, the barbecue work parties are held from 10 AM until 4 PM for 4 Saturdays prior to Memorial Day in order to prepare the picnic grounds for this major event. This is a great time to give a few hours - everyone can help. Work includes mowing,

weed eating, trash pick up, carpentry, lining shelves with paper, sweeping, and scrubbing. Children are welcome and lunch is served. Bring along your work gloves, sponges, rakes, weed-eaters, and clippers. Park at the volleyball court on the Muir Woods Road. Meet your neighbors, do some work, have some fun!

Third, it is time to call and volunteer for a committee. Call Anne at 388-2278 if you're unsure of where you're needed. It is a great help to committee chairs if volunteers call them, instead of their having to call and ask you! So call now, and make a committee chair happy! Areas where help is usually needed are: parking, entry booth, food prep and serving, and shirt sales. Beer and wine and desserts need a lot of help, but often have their share of eager volunteers.

Seriously in need of volunteers are Trash Pickup during the barbecue and Cleanup for 2-3 hours the day after the barbecue. Call Anne Jeschke now and know you are filling a most important need. Here is a way to give back to the community with only 2-3 hours of your time. For both these committees you have lots of free time the day of the barbecue. This is a great job for you if you want to entertain friends at the barbecue.

Call and Volunteer!

Where most needed	Anne	388-2278
Parking	Chris	388-5116
Shirts	Kathy	383-6762
Food	Erin	383-4152
Entry	Al	380-5068
Cleanup	Peter	388-0467

Sell or Buy Your Raffle Tickets!

Return your stubs and money promptly to Debra Allen. You'll only get 25 tickets to sell at a dollar each, so call Debra Allen and ask for more! 380-6137



This tranquil area with dilapidated structures will be turned into a bustling and beautiful picnic site for the barbecue. We need you at the May Work Parties to make it happen. Photograph by Julie Smith



Everybody Wins at the BBQ Raffle

By Debra Allen

I'm sure there is a neat story of how the firemen's May BBQ raffle got added in to the fundraiser day of eating chicken, buying t-shirts and drinks, but I don't know what that is. When we first moved out in the mid-1980s, someone just called and told us to show up with desserts that could be sold and to buy raffle tickets (seemed like everyone showed up with desserts then), so we did. And then one time we got a knock on the door and got handed a prize (it was fun to learn we'd won something). Then I started offering to contact Marin business owners for whoever was in charge of the raffle and adding to their collection of prizes. Then somehow, I took over the whole job of "doing the raffle" (that would have been in 1992).

And, yes, I have the prizewinner lists from then until now! I start work on this project each January, and usually finish up sometime each June. It makes good money for the department, the donors are usually so willing to give, and the winners are very nice about the fact that we've been known to misplace a prize or two over the years, and that what they win is often something that's a funny fit! I don't know if I'm supposed to say how much money the raffle brings in to the volunteer fire dept., but it makes me proud.

With the raffle, you'll never know which prize you might win, and you can buy as few or as many tickets that you'd like. We stuff the Muir Beach mail boxes with a \$25.00 ticket booklet (25 tickets @ \$1.00 each), but you can always ask for more, or just return the whole book for someone else to use. I generally end up with 100 prizes (Last year's prize list is posted online at www.muirbeachfire.com), and Muir Beachers commonly

win 1/3 of the prizes (they usually donate around 1/3 of the prizes, too). Winning a prize is just a way to say "thank you" for donating money to your volunteer fire department.

Prizes so far this year include a team jersey signed by the San Jose Sharks team, lots of books, kayak tours, symphony tickets, teas, and framed photos. Go to www.muirbeachfire.com to see the list of prizes that is ever growing as more prizes come in. In addition to updating the online list, I'll have the 2007 prize lists posted around town, too.

If you've got anything that you can donate to be a prize, please let me know (a certificate for a meal at your favorite restaurant, a new item, any art you've created or books you've had published...?), it would be greatly appreciated! And when you get your 2007 raffle booklets in early May, please buy as many tickets as you can, and feel free to ask for more! Good luck and thank you!
- Debra Allen 380-6137



Here's a photo of me and my raffle team (Sandra and Thomas, coloring something) from 1993. All the tickets went in to a little box back then. Nowadays we have an actual spinner thing, a fancy covered spot to sit, and the prizes are displayed neatly and safely behind the counter. Ticket by Bryce Browning. Ticket photograph by Bryce Browning.



T-Time

By Coleen Curry, Kathy Sward, and Anna Tom

What year was the MBVFD dog born?

- Summer of love, 1968
- 1969 (9 months after the summer of love)
- 1971
- 1973

Local graphic artist Bryce Browning is the proud papa of our beloved Muir Beach Volunteer Fire Department logo. Bryce is a long-term resident of Muir Beach, but back in 1971 when he was asked to design "some kind of logo," he was the new kid in town! The logo has been in constant use since its birth, but like the rest of us, has evolved over the years. The current logo, in its size and proportions, with type in a circular pattern, has been around since 1994. What's most unusual about the beloved logo is that its sales have increased with time, and is more and more popular with each passing year!

How do you run a store that's open for only one day!?!?

A lot of work goes into the T-shirts! We agonize over items, colors, sizes, styles. We consult with lots of our neighbors about what might be popular. We comb the latest magazines looking for the hottest new styles. And of course we revisit the old classics. We also try to guess the weather, and forecast best/worst case scenarios: tank tops...sweatshirts...sunny day...foggy day. Sometimes we make a great choice and sell out fast (yeah)! And yes, sometimes we choose stuff that just bombs. Our biggest challenge is getting high quality products at a price that is reasonable for



Fireman Chris Gove modeling men's tank and unisex baseball cap.

the customer and still profitable for the fundraiser. We've worked with an excellent T-shirt printer for many years and we've worked out many of the kinks with them, but sometimes they make mistakes too. We hope that if a product is defective that we hear about it, so we can make things right and continually improve our products.

Our store is actually open year-round online and "by appointment" (call Kathy Sward at 383-6762), but most of our sales occur on BBQ Day, and over the two days of the Muir Beach Quilters' Art Fair in December.

Please come by the T-shirt booth on BBQ Day and check out all the beautiful apparel in all the latest styles and colors. Come early for the best selection, we open at noon! MBVFD apparel makes great gifts! Make your shopping list ahead of time and our great volunteers will help make your shopping (we mean, community support!) a breeze.



Logo creator Bryce Browning expressing surprise over the enduring popularity of his design.

MBVFD T-Shirt Booth – We Need More Volunteers!

Working on the Muir Beach Volunteer Fire Department T-shirt Committee is great fun! We get to work with a world-famous logo, work with other volunteer neighbors, shop for the latest fashions, and open a clothing store for one day. The best part of our job is knowing that 100% of the proceeds support our fantastic local volunteer fire department. In fact, the proceeds from MBVFD dog-branded apparel are the only source of fundraising throughout the year that we can count on, unlike the grants that seem to be disappearing. So wear your dog with pride!

We need more volunteers, especially leading up to the BBQ!

- Pre-BBQ Inventory - one weekday sometime the week before BBQ
- Saturday Set-Up - arrange apparel in T-shirt booth.
- Sunday (BBQ Day) Set-Up - 9 am BBQ day - decorate the booth and continue setting up.
- Sunday Selling - Sell apparel in the T-shirt booth. We need some fun, friendly people who are good at math and can remember where things are shelved.
- Sunday After BBQ - Pack up unsold apparel and return to storage
- Post BBQ Inventory - some later date to be determined when we've recovered from the BBQ!

Please call Kathy Sward at 383-6762 or Anne Jeschke, volunteer coordinator, at 388-2278 if you'd like to volunteer. Thanks!

P.S. We would also love help researching new products, like dog items (leashes, collars), bumper stickers, domestically made apparel, organic and sustainable goods, etc., etc., etc.



Lynda Gross Silva and Daniella Silva modeling ladies' spaghetti tank and kids' T in front of fireman Matt Silva's gear locker.

Do you need a new Volunteer T- shirt for BBQ Day?

For the last few years, we've asked returning volunteers to reuse their Volunteer shirts and/or Volunteer bandannas and maybe you've wondered why. We noticed that lots of people proudly wear their Volunteer shirt throughout the year, and we will have lots of new shirts available for them. We also noticed that many volunteers only wear their T-shirts on BBQ Day. It's those folks that we ask to reuse their shirts so that we can help keep costs down. It's a couple thousand dollars to get a new shirt for each volunteer, so we hope to make the current volunteer shirts last as long as possible.

New Volunteer T-shirts are available for new volunteers or for anyone who needs one. Please ask your committee chair or Kathy.

Wanna be in pictures?

Have you seen the website? Julie Smith has done a great job setting up our online store! Check it out at: www.muirbeachfire.com/tee.html

We're thinking of featuring local residents wearing their MBVFD apparel in real life on the website. Email your pictures to: photos@muirbeachfire.com, subject line: Muir Beach Fire Photos. High resolution JPG photos are preferred. Add a caption, identify the people in the photo and the location, and credit the photographer if you'd like.



Fireman Jes Sward's family, Angie Banducci (also a firefighter, currently on hiatus) and their 1.5 month old son, Jackson Sward modeling adult baseball cap, ladies' tank, infant lap T and toddler baseball hat.



Kathy Sward (Chair of the T-shirt Committee and wife of Fire Chief John Sward) shows off the logo on the 100% cotton ladies' yoga pants.



Michael Kaufman (MBVFA President), Coleen Curry (T-shirt Committee), and Tayeko Kaufman wearing ventilator cap, men's unisex vest, baseball caps, ladies' T, and ladies' vest.

Partial Price List*

Denim Shirt	\$48
Pigment Dyed Crew L/S	\$24
Adult Unisex & Ladies T-Shirts	\$18
Ladies' & Men's Tank Tops	\$15
Ladies' Spaghetti Strap Tank	\$18
Fleece Outerwear	
(vests, jackets, ½ zip pullovers, etc.)	\$42-\$50
Hooded Sweat	\$38
Sweat Shirt	\$30
Sweat Pant	\$25
Ladies' 100% Cotton Yoga Pant	\$36
Beret	\$22
Baseball Cap	\$18
Denim Apron	\$22
Travel Blanket	\$48
Toddler & Kid Red Baseball Cap	\$16

Kids' Red Hooded Sweat	\$28
Kid Sweat	\$20
Baby Romper	\$16
Toddler & Kid T Shirt	\$12
Infant Lap Shoulder T	\$10

Sales & Closeouts

Men's (Unisex) Fleece Vests	\$35 (\$42)
Ventilator Caps	\$12 (\$22)

We'll also have lots of one-of-kind, and "last one" items on sale at the BBQ – come when we open at noon for the best selection!

**Prices may change either more or less as we finalize the order.*



Anna (T-shirt Committee) & future fireman Dylan Tom driving the fire truck in beret, ladies' spandex T, kids' baseball cap and kids' T.

MBVFD Logo by Bryce Browning
Photographs by Julie Smith

Muir Beach Residents become "CERT-ified"

By Anne Jeschke

On March 3 and 4, a gorgeous weekend in Muir Beach, 28 neighbors invested over 10 hours each to become trained and certified as community emergency responders. Trained by Marin County Battalion Chief Bill Roberts, with assistance from Throckmorton Ridge Division and our own Muir Beach Fire Department, these new CERT volunteers are ready and able to assist the Fire Department and their neighbors in case of disaster.

Again and again trainers pointed out that while Muir Beach is an idyllic village in many ways, the small numbers of residents and the isolation of the area will result in a slow response from emergency personnel facing a large disaster. Response will go to areas where help can be given quickly to the largest numbers of people. Thus, Muir Beach residents should be prepared to wait 5 - 7 days for assistance. To effectively deal with this, each household should be prepared to take care of themselves, as well as to help their neighbors as much as possible.

CERT training involved lectures, practice scenario's, group exercises, and even a barbecue lunch on the second day. The training requires a high level of active participation, and the local participants didn't hold back. There were many questions and spirited discussions. The lectures were fast moving and packed with important information. But the practice exercises were the major part of the training, and those were fun in addition to being informative.

Training began with exercises that involved teamwork. Groups of seven prioritized lists of supplies needed in an isolated disaster situation. It was more difficult than it first appeared, as was working together and coming to an agreement. But later exercises were easier as groups learned to quickly select a leader and assign individual tasks for efficiency.



Chief John Sward instructs trainees on meters, while Bob Hayden looks on.

- A series of learning stations came after a lecture and slides:
- How and where to turn off the propane, electricity, and water.
 - What tools are needed and how to use them.
 - Under what circumstances a turn off is necessary.

- Following this, the volunteers learned some basic first aid techniques. Here again there were stations for demonstration and practice for:
- Triage - assessing injuries and getting immediate help where needed.
 - Methods for opening airways and stopping bleeding.
 - Emergency splinting for broken bones.
 - Treating shock and treating burn victims.
 - Transporting the injured with makeshift stretchers.

Training went straight through from 9 AM until 2 PM on Saturday, and homework assignments included checking one's own propane, water, and electricity meters, as well as reading several chapters in the CERT manual.



Marin County Battalion Chief Bill Roberts teaches Tayeko Kaufman, Anne Jeschke, Bob Hayden, and Frank Schoenfeld, how to safely move an injured victim.

The second day of training was again filled with information and practice. Fire prevention and fire suppression were the first topics. Every volunteer practiced:

- Using an extinguisher to put out a fire.
- Carrying, setting up and climbing a ladder.
- Searching a damaged building for hazards and victims.
- Using cribbing to lift debris from a trapped victim.

Manuals were also provided to the participants so that they can continue to learn and refresh their disaster preparedness skills. Volunteers also received yellow helmets, goggles, and bright orange vests to identify and protect them as trained personnel if disaster strikes.

The active training both days was interspersed with lectures and slides full of information for preventing disaster, as well as responding to it. The first key is always prevention and preparation, particularly for fire and earthquakes. Most residents know the general rules - but for very specific lists, check www.muirbeachfire.com and click on "emergency prep." It's all there and it's easily accessible.

Trainers stressed that all residents need to take responsibility for themselves and their property

Emergency preparedness is an on-going process, and the CERT training is just one part of that. Your safety will be based on your family's preparations. You cannot rely on your more prepared neighbor!

The Basic Basics:

- 1) Fill out your Household Registry Form and put it in the Fire Department mailbox by the Pelican Inn. The form can be found at www.muirbeachfire.com or by calling Michael Kaufman at 388-5018.
- 2) Begin today to stock your Disaster Supplies Kit and Food Kit, adding to it weekly until it is complete.
- 3) Sign up for First Aid, CPR, or CERT, as they become available.
- 4) Go to www.muirbeachfire.com/emergency.html#kit for details on all of these.

- having fire extinguishers that work, clearing brush on their property, having water, food, and emergency supplies for at least 5 days, to name a few. And all residents should be aware of their neighbors' needs. Who is there in the daytime? Are there pets? Where are the gas and electricity turnoffs? Which homes have children and older folks who might need special help?

In any emergency, the Fire Department will be our primary source of help. CERT trained volunteers, with help from the disaster preparedness neighborhood liaisons, will visit their neighbors and get word to the fire department on where the greatest needs are. They can check each home to learn if everyone is safe and the structure is intact. They can assist in use of fire extinguishers if fires are small. They can provide basic first aid until help arrives. They can assist in turning off gas and electricity when necessary. They can help

organize resources - food, water, generators, flashlights, and such - helping neighbors share what they have.

The day ended with a real sense of satisfaction on the part of the volunteers, as well as an increased understanding of what more needs to be done. More than one newly certified emergency responder went home to improve their family's emergency supplies!

Kudo's to Fire Chief John John Sward and his department who assisted in the training and provided a lunch of barbecued tri-tip on Sunday; to Michael Kaufman for arranging the training; to Battalion Chief Bill Roberts and his assistants for a fast-paced, fun and valuable class; and to the 28 volunteers who invested their time and energy to be trained to help our community. The entire community benefits from their training.



Cribbing involves using everyday materials to lift heavy loads that might be trapping a victim underneath. Practicing with a Marin County firefighter are Kent Andrews, Edna Rossenas, Dave MacKenzie, Kathy Sward, and Peter Rudnick.



Safely searching dark and damaged buildings requires skill and teamwork. Chief Roberts practices with Kathy Sward, Lea Wood, Peter Rudnick, and Edna Tossenias.



Tayeko Kaufman extinguishes a fire under the watchful eye of Fireman Garcia while class members watch and learn. Each trainee practiced using a fire extinguisher.

These neighbors are newly certified emergency responders in event of a disaster.

Kent Andrews	Will Koza	Arlene Robertson	Susy Stewart
Oshana Biondi	Marilyn Laatch	Peter Rosselli	Ed Stiles
Herb Case	David MacKenzie	Edna Rossenas	Kathy Sward
Bob Hayden	Bonnie MacKenzie	Peter Rudnick	Nikola Tede
Anne Jeschke	Laraine Miller	Frank Schoenfeld	Bethany Villere
Tayeko Kaufman	Shirley Nygren	Brent Smith	Peter Wood
Al Kile	Fleche Phoenix	Julie Smith	Lea Wood



The trainees assembled at the end of two days of training and watched Edna Rossenas's fire extinguishing skills.



Coffee or water breaks were social events with neighbors. Shirley Nygren, Tayeko Kaufman, Edna Rossenas, Anne Jeschke, Arlene Robertson, Al Kile, Nikola Tede, and Susy Stewart enjoy a few minutes of relaxation between training sessions.

Photographs by Julie Smith.

Beachcomber Spotlight: Asst. Fire Chief Michael Moore

By Linda Gibbs

This is the second in a series of interviews with the members of the Muir Beach Volunteer Fire Department. 16 First Responders and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) give of their time and energy without benefit of compensation to protect us, our homes, and our community. Today we speak with one of the four Assistant Fire Chiefs.

Michael Moore has been involved in volunteer firework since the early 1980s when he attended Humboldt State University and lived in Trinidad. One day his next door neighbor, a large and imposing blonde woman, knocked on the door and said to him and his roommates who were from Muir Beach, "Okay, all you guys are on the fire department." Michael rose in the ranks at the Trinidad Volunteer Fire Department and became captain, earning his EMT license during that period. During school breaks he became involved in the Muir Beach Volunteer Fire Department as the first EMT at the beach. When he finished school, he returned to the area and has lived here ever since. He served as an Assistant Fire Chief in the early 1990s, Fire Chief from 1995 to 2001, and once again holds the position of Assistant Fire Chief. Michael lives with his wife, Ellen Mettler, and their 8-year-old son, Maxx. Michael and Ellen met when they were both volunteering for the fire department. They would often be the last people cleaning up after events, and as Michael says, "one thing led to another and here we are."

When did you move to Muir Beach?

In 1963 when I was in the first grade. I lived with my parents at 7 Seacape when Seacape was a dirt road with just three houses. I have pictures of me on a tricycle going down the dirt road. And there were no trees. There were horses up here; it was grazing land all the way up to the Overlook. It was all dairy, dairy ranches and a cattle ranch. Muir Beach was a private beach.

What do you do for a living?

I'm a general contractor. When I was growing up, there was a family, the Gillespies, who lived just below us. Dave Gillespie was a contractor. When I was in high school, I had a '57 Chevy and I started out doing some hauling, making dump runs for him. And one thing led to another and I became an apprentice under him and we built a bunch of houses out here at



Asst. Fire Chief Michael Moore. Photograph by Julie Smith

the beach. Being in construction, all through school, I would go to school for two quarters, take the spring and summer off and work to earn enough money to go back to school for two more quarters, and eventually I got my degree.

Did you come back to Muir Beach right after college?

I graduated in 1984 from Humboldt and lived in Tam Valley for a while. I came to Muir Beach a lot. I may even have been on the Muir Beach fire department at that point. They may have made an exception. I remember coming out and going to several calls when I happened to be here. One was an abandoned baby of all things that John John and I responded to. It was on Mother's Day. I remember coming down and seeing John John. You could tell by his eyes that something was up so I followed him down to where the horse camp is now. There was an old barn down there because of all the dairy ranches. There was a

bunch of rubble, and some bird watchers heard the baby crying and alerted us.

Do you know how old the baby was?

It was a newborn baby with the umbilical cord and placenta still attached.

As an Asst. Chief, do you have responsibilities for certain areas of the fire department?

To do as much as you are capable of doing, and so being an all-volunteer fire department, I try to be involved in as much of the training as I can. I try to make it to all the training that we do. And just because of Ellen's cancer right now, I can't devote a lot of time to it so I'm not as active as I could be. Asst. Chiefs—and members—take on tasks as the need comes up, such as in maintenance or training. We have checklists that we review every time we meet, and we go over the trucks and all the equipment and check everything, i.e., oxygen levels in the tanks, making sure there's oil in everything, starting up all the chain saws, making sure our breathing apparatuses are in working order and our bottles are full. We check batteries and flashlights. We have a checklist for the medical kits.

And this is every time you meet?

Every time we meet.

That's impressive. How long does it take?

We have it down to about a half hour depending on when everyone shows up at the firehouse. Everyone jumps in and we just go down the checklist.

And so the department isn't set up so that each Asst. Fire Chief covers certain areas of responsibility. You do a little bit of everything depending on where you're needed, is that correct?

Sure, that would be fair. We get together and talk about the training and then divide stuff up. People volunteer for different tasks.

And when you say training, are you talking about the training of the firefighters or the training of the community, or of both?

Mainly the firefighters. A lot of firefighters will attend extra CPR classes because it's nice to be involved with the community. We try to get the firefighters involved in the CERT classes, too. But we also have to make sure that people don't over-volunteer because you can burn people out. One of the things that the association does—which is great—is taking over the Barbecue. Even though a lot of the firefighters still participate, it's not a fire department-run event. It's

an association-run event. Michael Kaufman does a great job and so do all the other volunteers. It's been such a big production that it was overwhelming a lot of the firefighters. A lot of community members have stepped up so we can focus on the firefighting.

When did the association take over the Barbecue? In the 1990s. (May1994)

You moved from Asst. Chief to Fire Chief and then back to Asst Chief. What are the differences between the two jobs?

As the Fire Chief you get all the phone calls from the county agencies. You are the chief officer so you're the one anyone calls who has questions. For example, with a search and rescue, often they will call John John directly or page him so he calls back. He's the head contact person. It's a lot more hours and visibility being out there. You also help with the fundraising, which means grant writing. You meet regularly with the fire association, the CSD, the West Marin Chiefs, and any other training or meetings with the Park Service or CSD. It adds up.

The Chief runs the department and plans the training. As an Asst. Chief, are you doing pieces of that?

Right. We try to fill in. We've even talked at some point about having a rotating chief officer so everyone gets the hot seat for a bit. But the Fire Chief is at a different skill level, and John John does such a great job that as long as he wants to do it, we are behind him 100%!

Besides finding an abandoned newborn baby, what are some other highlights of being a firefighter?

I can only talk about it in vague terms because as people in the healthcare service, we can't talk about those we help because of privacy reasons. In vague terms: cliff rescues, brush fires, medical emergencies—80% of what we do is medical-based—including vehicle accidents. We go to Muir Woods, so all the visitation there, everything under the sun. No one's immune to disaster or taking injury or becoming ill. That's why we have to train so many hours and put a lot of emphasis on firefighter safety and knowledge of heart attacks, strokes, allergic reactions, pediatric emergencies, burns, and broken bones.

With a million people going through Muir Woods every year, that's a lot of "under the sun."

And in Muir Beach, too. We are in a sleepy hamlet, but during the summer months the population can swell. As we see now with the road closures—the



Asst. Fire Chief Michael Moore gears up at the firehouse to run a structural call. Photograph by Julie Smith

detours—how vulnerable we are to getting in and out. That's one of the things about having the fire department here; it's an integral part during a disaster. The county is not going to be able to come down here right away. The roads could be washed out or any number of things—unimaginable things—could happen.

We are glad you're here.

I think people living in rural places as opposed to urban places tend to be less fearful of other people. People have asked me why do you go help the motorcycle riders, they're not part of the community? I think a lot of our feeling is, well, it's our house and if you get injured in our house, then we are going to take care of you.

Do you get that question often?

No, not often, but it's been expressed.

You have a long-range perspective of the fire department from the early 1980s until now. Regarding the rhythms of the department, are

there peaks and valleys? Are some years quieter than others? Or is it pretty much of a steady response to humanity?

Well, you never know. There's no rhyme or reason. We have our certain superstitions. We think that calls come in threes. We joke about it. "You have two calls. Okay, get ready for the third one." In the wintertime, we can be responding to floods and mudslides and all those kinds of things. In the summer, it's more tourist based. Right now with the roads closed it's been really quiet. It's been great.

What are some other superstitions besides calls come in threes?

People get crazy around the full moon, things like that. Often times, especially during the summer, you'll get a sense of how things are going to be crazier than at other times, particular weekends, Fourth of July, Labor Day. Certain times you can feel the energy out there and we just try to be a little more on alert to be able to respond quicker.

Does that mean that on a holiday weekend, you tend not to plan your own personal outings or activities, that this is the time you're working or that you're ready to work if you're needed?

Sometimes when you feel that type of thing, you just stick around, and you listen more. But I also think it's important that being a volunteer doesn't rule your life, that you need to be able to do other things. And one of the things that you need to learn is not to feel guilty about being out of town and not to feel responsible for others' dilemmas, that you are there to help, and we'll do what we can. But you are not going to do it at risk to yourself or your family.

That's an excellent reminder for the other firefighters and for all of us.

Yes, we definitely want to be able to come home from each call. And now with AIDS and Hepatitis, we really take what we call BSI (Body, Substance, Isolation) very seriously. We work on having gloves and masks, if appropriate, because we do deal with blood and people call us when they're sick or injured. The whole healthcare industry is geared up for it and the fire department is on the front lines of it. Marin County does a great job of helping us keep up with all those standards because things change and it's getting tougher and tougher to be a fire department. You have more regulations and standards that you have to keep up with. For instance, after 9/11 we were issued gas masks and we talked about decontamination and radiation and chemical and biological agents.

So you trained for those possibilities?

Yes, we try to keep up with it. We are trained in hazardous materials.

Have you seen any changes in the department since you stepped down in May 2001?

I don't think the fire department really missed a beat. We have so many strengths and numbers that people step up. For instance, if John John and I aren't there, it goes down the chain of command. We go right down to the last person.

John John said that you're one of the firefighters who's often in the community during the day. Have you ever gone on a call by yourself, and if so, what's that like?

Yes. The more calls you go on, the more comfortable you feel. New firefighters always like having some of the more experienced firefighters to show them the way and make it an easier transition, to show them by example. Going by yourself is something that has been done many times. Once again, as John John had pointed out before, one of our main functions is to give an accurate report on what we have been called out for, to give an accurate location and a good size up of either a fire or a medical call, reporting on how the patient is doing. That way, we can tailor the response because we have so many resources from over the hill: Southern Marin, Marin County, Stinson Beach, helicopters, etc. If we can give an accurate report on conditions, then we can keep all the resources coming or we can tone it down if we can handle the situation ourselves.

We do a lot of role playing where we talk with the radios. It's very helpful, gets the adrenalin up. The role playing is pretty realistic.

To help the new firefighters?

To help everyone. You can get rusty if you don't run calls for a while. That's why we do so much training on it. It keeps us in practice.

It's hard to talk about going on a call by yourself. You go there, the adrenalin is up. You roll the appropriate truck. If it's a fire, we bring the bigger one; if it's medical, we bring the squad truck that has the defibrillator (AED), and is a little quicker. And you go. A typical thing is you come out of the barn, you radio to Woodacre that we are responding.

Woodacre?

Woodacre is the dispatch center, the Marin County headquarters. When we talk about Woodacre, it's basically headquarters. They handle all their satellite stations: Marin City, Throckmorton, Tomales, Point Reyes. So we call on the radio that we are responding. When we get to the scene, we say "on scene, investigating." And then we describe the situation. If it's a fire, we describe the fire: rate of spread, size, type of conditions. If it's a medical, we take the vitals, assess the patient, and then give that information to headquarters with the type of treatment that we're doing.


It sounds as if you have to move quickly.

We practice on trying to be relaxed. Safety is very important. When you get called out, the worse thing you can do is become part of the problem. So we obey to the best of our abilities all traffic laws in getting down to the firehouse. Although we may go a little faster, we try not to pass cars and we don't have lights or sirens until we get into the truck. And then once we get there, we have lights and sirens, and then people tend to pull over. But it can be frustrating on a very busy weekend if the streets are crowded, especially for John John when Pacific Way gets backed up. It can take him a while to respond. Or if you're driving down Sunset and there's a propane truck in the way, you have to wait for it to move.

You say you practice being relaxed. How do you do that?

Once again, role playing helps with it. On our last truck, our big green truck, John John had a nice big label printed right on the dashboard that said "Relax, breathe." When I was Chief, I would tend to get really uptight around the barbecue, and there would be so much going on with everyone asking me questions. I remember Sutton—Sutton Freebairn Smith, a fireman who lived here for many years, lives up in Mendocino now—telling me, "Remember, Mike, it's like a duck, cool on top, paddling like hell underneath."

You are not paid for your services. What is your reward for contributing all these years as a volunteer firefighter?

A sense of community that Muir Beach had in those days and still has. And it's one of those things that gets in your blood. It's just the camaraderie and giving back to the community because otherwise it doesn't get done. 

No BYOB at Memorial Day BBQ

By Paul Jeschke




The beer and wine concession booth should be even busier this year. The State Parks Department is insisting on enforcement of the "NO BYOB" rule. Photograph by Bryce Browning

Forget about bringing a private stash of beer, wine or other alcoholic beverages to the Muir Beach Volunteer Fire Department Barbeque this year. Coolers will be checked at the entrance gate and individuals attempting to smuggle beverages into the popular event will be asked to leave the booze behind.

Stricter enforcement of the long-standing rule comes at the request of the California Department of Parks and Recreation which issued a "none too subtle" threat to withhold future permits if enforcement were not ramped-up, according to Michael Kaufman, president of the MBVFD Association. Since the parking lot and most of the picnic area are on state park property, revocation of the permit would be tantamount to cancellation. The barbeque is the fire department's major fundraiser and losing it would be a "financial disaster for the department," Kaufman said.

Beer, wine and soft drinks will not be in short supply, however, and will be available for purchase at the concession booth throughout the day. Anyone buying alcohol must be wearing a color-coded wristband. The plastic bracelets will be snapped on at the entrance gate after an ID check. L.J. (Laura) Wong, Supervising Ranger for Mount Tamalpais, said she would personally monitor the ID and cooler checkpoint for compliance. As usual, Marin County Sheriff's Deputies will also be on hand.

Wong said she was concerned that excessive drinking had become a public safety concern.

Barbeque organizers plan to post signs along Muir Woods Road advising partygoers of the "No BYOB" rule. In addition, flyers will be handed out at the parking entrance to reinforce the message. 

MBVFD Incident Log

Compiled by Paul Jeschke

The closure of Highway One greatly reduced the number of visitors to Muir Beach and vicinity and as a result, there were far fewer emergency calls than normal.

February 18, 7:10 pm

Muir Beach

Kitchen worker at the Pelican Inn cut finger. Transported herself to Marin General Hospital.

March 14, 4:20 pm

Muir Woods National Monument

Visitor bumped head on automobile trunk. Minor injury. MBVFD response cancelled.



MBVFD Logo by Bryce Browning.



Changing Times

By Pam Barlow

It's been a scant two months since we submitted our "Hello From the Quilters" feature, but in many ways, it seems far more time has passed.

Writing that article was cathartic, in that it gave us an occasion to tell the old stories, relish our collective history, and bask in nostalgia for what seem now to have been simpler times. But it also brought into focus the changes we've been striving to make and the challenges we face in our attempts. We realized that our "Hello" echoed over a vast chasm of thirty-seven years, during which change, as always, has been constant. But things changed more slowly then. Today, even here in the Brigadoonian outskirts, our world moves faster and gives birth to new universes, (micro, macro and virtual), by the nanosecond. Remember how absolutely true and revolutionary the words sounded when Bob Dylan sang them so long ago: "The times, they are a changin'..."? Well, they were "a' changin'" then and they still are. Only faster.

Revisiting the group's original mission statement was bitter-sweet; sweet because the intentions were so genuine and worthy and still ring true, especially our desire to provide a "safe, confidential environment for...fellowship." And ever-so-slightly bitter because, through the lens of over three decades of upheaval - global, environmental, technological, geopolitical, etc., - we discover that our aspirations are expanding faster than our abilities to realize them. For as the world has been speeding up, many of us have begun to strive for a life where one allows oneself the luxury of slowing down.

Since that article was published, we've been focusing on how to address this bitter-sweet paradox.

Beyond the actual sewing of quilts, so much of what the Quilters are about is story; the gathering together to tell and listen to tales, an art as ancient as weaving, an oral tradition that has evolved into some of our greatest literature. Even Homer's Odyssey, despite its emphasis on war and patriarchy, reserves a place of high regard for the intelligence and handiwork of Odysseus' wife, Penelope. It was the weaving of her tapestry that maintained peace and order in her politically fractious homeland. We might call Penelope The Original Quilter.

While not all stories are as epic as The Odyssey, for every quilt - in fact, for every piece of fabric sewn lovingly into every quilt - there is a story. These tales deserve to be told and heard, because, by virtue of their ability to illustrate how alike we are, they possess tremendous power to heal and connect. We will always cherish the old stories. But while each Quilter continues to evolve in the creation of her individual art, we are also beginning to tell a new collective story.

We find ourselves living in a global community that is weaving its tale at an unprecedented pace. While it may have taken thousands of years of human culture to produce The Odyssey, time today is a creature of a different stripe. It has begun to lose its sensuality, its connection to the earth, to the animal, to the feminine, to the material as opposed to the virtual. So the Quilters cling mightily to the indigenous wisdom and pastimes, and to our right to linger in moments of indulgent leisure and earthly pleasures.

On any afternoon at the Quilters, one is likely to uncover treasure. When we finally got around to tackling the closet-cleaning, some lovely gems emerged from amidst the chaos of the fabric bins; squares of beautiful Yukata fabric,

generously donated long ago by Kristen Shannon for the purpose of making a group quilt. So while much discussion had already transpired about the theme of our next Raffle Quilt, lo and behold, the answer had been waiting in an old story ready to be retold in a new way, for new times. Tayeko Kaufman found fabrics perfect for the baby quilts she's been sewing, and Nancy Sequeira took a selection to give to the quilters of Boonville's Los Hilos de la Vida, (Threads of Life). Kathy Sward delighted in the discovery of some diminutive and truly extraordinary jewels of fabric to incorporate into her miniature quilts, selections from which she has been invited to show at Marin General during the months of April and May.

Quilters' Wednesdays are also adventures in culinary collaboration. Recently we've enjoyed Tayeko's home-made carrot-ginger soup, spiced deviled eggs that Bruce Barlow sent over, (greatly improving upon the humble hard boiled eggs his wife had planned to show up with), hearty breads and stews that Kathy's created, Judith's fire-roasted green peppers...each week is a spontaneous pot-luck of yummy, down-home fare that comes together in the moment. Larry Yamamoto surprised us with a luscious roast chicken and crab salad, and graced us by staying for lunch and spirited conversation. Maury Ostroff stopped in for a visit, and a passionate discourse ensued covering a broad range of topics, including philosophy and world affairs. It is a joy to be able to engage with neighbors and express what may be differing opinions, especially when we are able to toss ideas around without rancor. Despite what differences we may have, there is much more to agree on, and friends can disagree and still remain friends. So, should you find yourself near the Community Center around lunch time on a Wednesday, please - come in. Break bread with us, have a glass of wine, tell us your stories,



Kathy Sward, Judith Yamamoto and Nancy Sequeira with a selection of the Yukata fabrics for our next raffle quilt. Photograph by Julie Smith

linger and enjoy the moment. You'll always be welcome.

After what seems like forever, Claire Johnston has returned from her family vacation in Kauai, and it's sure great to have her back. Outi Onorato has also dropped in regularly for the morning phase of the gatherings, another person it's always good to see. We've missed Coleen Curry, who has been studying hand-bookbinding with a well-known international bookbinder. A couple of months ago, the Quilters made a field trip to view Coleen's work at the Gleeson Library at U.S.F., where it was featured in The Hand Bookbinders of California's Thirty-fourth Annual Exhibition. Her work is finely detailed and lushly textured, and to say the least, we were all completely "wowed."

After a long sojourn in Mexico, a great friend of the Quilters, Katrinka McCay, is back in town. Thanks to her in her capacity as GM for the Pelican Inn, the Arts Fair volunteers were well fed with a generous donation of the Inn's Guinness beef stew. Katrinka's currently busy with her new business, Beltane Flowers, in Santa Rosa. Welcome home Katrinka, and thanks so much for your long-standing generosity.

In early March, we were delighted by a visit from Bernard Halliwell, who brought in a beautiful quilt by Dianne Emery Springer. It was a crazy-quilt crafted in a sensuous palette of reds, purples, golds, browns and greens, featuring an array of motifs; gold stars on red satin, opalescent plaids, double-helix-like spiraling lattices, leafy tendrils - wild and vibrant fabrics that sang of spring and new growth. One fabric, featuring a pattern of delicate Klimpt-esque ovals floating like lily pads on a reflecting pond, was featured throughout the quilt and used for the borders, seeming to be, as Nancy Sequeira suggested, a key to the logic of the entire piece. The quilt was machine-stitched in swirling, cresting wave-like shapes that resonated within each individual fabric. Thank you Bernard for sharing this with us. We hope you'll let us know how its story unfolds and whether it took the journey you mentioned it was bound for. We hope you are the one who ultimately took it home, because you so obviously "got" it.

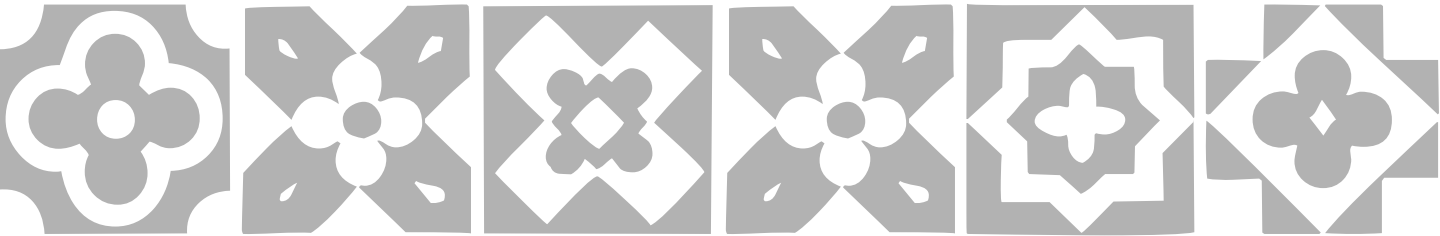
A new life story began on March 5th, 2007, when Jaxson Giuseppe Sward was born to Angie Banducci and Jes Sward. This, of course, bestowed the status of grandmother and grandfather respectively upon Kathy and John John Sward. When asked what they would like to be called, (since "grandma" and "grandpa" are so often considered passé these days), Kathy, not having given it any prior thought, remembers replying, "Whatever." Knowing how little ones develop their own language, we laughed that perhaps she would wind up being called "What-em-Ma" and John John, "What-em-Pa."

And so our Wednesdays come and go. We work, we chat, we break bread, philosophize, create, laugh - and laugh *a lot*. So good for the soul.

Still we face the paradox of how to honor our desires to slow down personally, while making a communal contribution to a world that is speeding up. We face the paradox of how, locally, to make a meaningful difference in a world that is increasingly globally interdependent. As individuals, we are as varied as the fabrics on the quilt Bernard shared with us, but often the harmony and balance of the whole are established through contrast. We are a group of women artists who want to contribute to causes without borders of time or territory. And yet we would like to step mindfully and enjoy our days one stitch at a time.

In a courageous attempt to reconcile this paradox, one of our founding members, Judith Yamamoto, has conceived The Vision Project, which is currently in deep process. As imagined, it will be a new chapter for the Quilters, that, building on our history, will continue a story of expanded giving. As it was Penelope's quest centuries ago, it remains up to the weavers of the story and the cloth to create fabric strong and flexible enough to contain not just the arts, but the fellowship that nourishes and connects us. Time seems in such short supply, and yet, if we stand *perfectly still*, there is all the time in the world.

Please see the poetry page for two of Judith's poems that speak to, among other things, our collective desire for the success of the Vision Project.



Notes from Greater Muir Beach Neighbors:
**What Does the Future
Hold for Pacific Way?
Or, One Tree Is Worth A
Thousand Words**

By Judith Yamamoto

Right now, the news is not good. After some three years of work by the National Park Service (NPS), including collaboration with the County of Marin and the input of countless state and federal agencies, the NPS has applied for a permit to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to complete the wetland and creek restoration project at Big Lagoon, Muir Beach.

Greater Muir Beach Neighbors is boiling down the areas of concern to those which deal directly with Mailbox Row at Highway One, Pacific Way, the Big Beach parking lot, and Pacific Way flooding.

The NPS/County construction projects include, at present, the proposed installation of a 50-foot-long bus stop with concrete curbs and sidewalk at the Dairy; doubling the width of Pacific Way, already a two-lane road; and reconfiguration of the Big Beach parking lot without designation of a small bus (West Marin Stagecoach) stop.

These projects demonstrate an astonishing lack of scale and sensitivity on the part of NPS planning consultants, and threaten the natural beauty and the historic, rural character of Muir Beach.

On top of that, the NPS has failed to integrate meaningful and appropriately scaled public transit into those plans. Cars speeding down a Pacific Way thoroughfare? The big Muir Woods shuttle stopping every twenty minutes at the Dairy? Beachgoers walking three quarters of a mile from bus stop to beach?

This plan is overkill. It ruins the environment it is supposed to support. It is a failure.

I'm printing the last letter Greater Muir Beach Neighbors wrote to Supervisor Steve Kinsey, following the loss of West Marin Stagecoach



Muir Beachers join hands to demonstrate how far a thirty-six foot wide GGNRA-envisioned Pacific Way will stretch, not counting additional width as it enters Highway One. Left to right: Bruce Barlow, Larry Yamamoto, Linda Gibbs, Cora Onorato, Outi Onorato, Kathy Sward, Edna Rossenas, Judith Yamamoto, Maureen Pinto, Susy Stewart, and Susy's horse, Jasmine. Photograph by Julie Smith

service along Highway One, which ties into all of the issues delineated above. (See page 26.)

Greater Muir Beach Neighbors will continue going through the process, including requesting a public hearing to consider the application of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Right now, we all need to be vigilant, to stay tuned for alerts, and to speak up to the NPS, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the County—or we'll end up with a superhighway to Big Beach!

Peaceful wishes, Judith Yamamoto, co-chair
Greater Muir Beach Neighbors



This Monterey Pine, as well as a portion of the corral and the old cattle-loading chute, will all disappear in the reconfiguration of Highway One where it turns off into a 36-foot-wide Pacific Way. Photograph by Julie Smith

March 26, 2007

Supervisor Steve Kinsey, District 4
Marin County Board of Supervisors
3501 Civic Center Drive
Room 329
San Rafael CA 94903

Dear Steve Kinsey,

We were surprised and outraged at your action in eliminating Stagecoach service to the Muir Beach area. The rationale for the discontinuation of this service was entirely flawed, from improperly conducted ridership counts, to the discounting of a significant population that relied on the service, to the blind eye turned to the overwhelming numbers of potential riders who have no public transit access to our recreation area. Finally, we can hardly believe that there is such a total lack of planning for, or even consideration of, the increased Stagecoach service needed on the coastal route to make it a truly viable alternative to dependence on individual cars.

In fact, Marin County Transit District planning, and your agreement with it, shows an astonishing rejection of the whole concept of fighting global warming, which we would expect to be a concept in which "green" Marin County would continue to demonstrate a leadership role.

You, Amy Van Doren and Suzanne Bourguignon have indicated a desire to meet with the community to discuss transportation planning, including community carpools. We have been carpooling for years, because there have been no other options. There is no way that car/van pooling can solve public transit needs in Muir Beach. It can solve a few cases of need (and probably not well), but it cannot address the larger issue of local work and school commuting, and it cannot begin to address the issue of recreational access to Muir Beach area parklands. The Stagecoach is the only realistic solution for these needs; taking it away to fulfill another community's needs is a terrible mistake, and raises the question – in West Marin, how can long-needed public transit policy be transformed from an auspicious beginning to total failure? Whose service will be cut next?

We are also greatly concerned that the Big Lagoon Restoration Project's improvement of Pacific Way be carried out on a scale that preserves the environment and the historic character of Muir Beach, and that it intelligently balances the recreational and restoration components of County and GGNRA planning.

Here, in brief, is what needs to happen:

1. The West Marin Stagecoach is the appropriate vehicle to provide local and recreational public transit along Highway One, stopping at Green Gulch Farm, the equestrian stable at the Dairy, the Pelican Inn, the Muir Beach parking lot, Slide Ranch, hiking and biking trailheads, and informally along the route (one of things we love about the Stage). The Stage's small size will not impact adversely on the historic character of Muir Beach, and will allow it to run along an appropriately sized Pacific Way.
2. Local transit needs will never be served, and transit service will always be under-utilized, if its vehicles are not scheduled to run early enough, late enough, and often enough to provide transportation to the riders who need it.
3. The Muir Woods Shuttle should not stop at the Highway One/Pacific Way intersection. It is already full of Muir Woods-bound visitors when it leaves Richardson Bay and Marin City bus stops; it should continue to provide this non-stop service to Muir Woods. The size of the Shuttle, frequency of its runs, and number of riders are out of scale for the character of Muir Beach.
4. The parking lot at Big Beach must be designed as a "shrinking parking lot." We have long advocated getting people out of their cars by providing a Stage stop at the Muir Beach parking lot, and eliminating parking spacers there commensurate with the number of visitors riding the Stage.
5. The current width of Pacific Way has allowed safe passage to all users for many decades, and there is no reason to change it now. The County/GGNRA's proposed plan is totally unacceptable; the spirit of Pacific Way would be destroyed by its built-in high-speed vehicular use and by the sheer quantity of concrete paving over our Big Lagoon floodplain.
6. The exit road to the Muir Beach parking lot must exit Pacific Way at the earliest point possible.
7. There must be specific, long-term remedies for the flooding problems on Pacific Way, both at the Pelican Inn site and especially at the entrance to Big Beach.

We ask you to support our objectives, move quickly to restore Muir Beach area Stagecoach service, and work with us to achieve the best possible planning for the Big Lagoon Restoration Project.

Sincerely, Judith Yamamoto, co-chair
Greater Muir Beach Neighbors

The Muir Beach Community Services District - A Personal View

By Maury Ostroff

Author's Note: The views expressed herein are my own, and are not necessarily the opinions of other Board members or an official communication from the Board of Directors of the MBCSD.)

There's an old story about Dwight Eisenhower, who was reported to have said that when he was a General in command of all allied forces in the European theatre he would say "Do This" and "Do That" and people would scurry off and do this and do that. Then he became President of the United States and he would say "Do This" and "Do That" and people would say yes and then nothing would happen.

Perhaps this is an illustrative tale on the limits of power in a complex bureaucracy, but one that I shall use as an introduction to explain what the Muir Beach Community Services District is, and is not.

The California Special Districts Association maintains a web site (www.csda.net) which contains lots of general information about special districts for those who are inquisitive, but the salient points are captured in the following paragraphs:

Special districts are a form of local government created by a local community to meet a specific need. Inadequate tax bases and competing demands for existing taxes make it hard for cities and counties to provide all the services their citizens desire. When residents or landowners want new services or higher levels of existing services, they can form a district to pay for and administer them.

Nearly 85% of California's special districts perform a single function such as sewage, water, fire protection, pest abatement or cemetery management. Multi-function districts, like community services districts, provide two or more services.

Special districts are primarily accountable to the voters who elect their boards of directors and the customers who use their services. However, although they are not functions of the state, the state also provides critical oversight to special district operations. Special districts must submit annual financial reports to the State Controller and must also follow state laws pertaining to public meetings, bonded debt, record keeping and elections.

The point is that the Muir Beach Community Services District has limited jurisdiction, i.e., we are not a general form of government such as an incorporated township with a mayor, police chief, etc. Rather, the CSD was originally formed for one purpose only, oversight and operation of the Water System. Later, this was expanded to include oversight over publicly owned roads and easements, and the community center. But it is important to note that as part of unincorporated Marin, the local government of Muir Beach is effectively Marin County. But equally important to note is that the CSD is not organizationally part of Marin County government, nor are we part of the State Government either. In other words, the CSD is not in any way designated to be the legal representatives of Muir Beach with respect to the County or State with respect to matters outside of our charter.

For Marin County, we are represented by Supervisor Steve Kinsey of the 4th District. In the California State Assembly, we are represented by Jared Huffman of the 6th Assembly District. In the California State Senate, our state senator is Carole Migden of the 3rd Senate District. Our United States congresswoman representing the California 6th Congressional District is Lynn Woolsey, and our two United States Senators representing California are Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein. The President of the United States is George W. Bush. Last but not least, the current Supervisor of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area of the National Park Service is Brian O'Neill.

All of these distinguished personages can be contacted by any citizen of Muir Beach on any topic of general interest. The point I'm trying to make is that the CSD is not the official designate to any of the above legislative or administrative bodies on topics outside our jurisdiction. Certainly we play an unofficial role in ensuring that the general community interest is heard, but it is not our role to represent Muir Beach on every matter of concern. Conversely, none of the people mentioned in the preceding paragraph has any authority or say in when Harvey reads the water meters - only the MBCSD can do that.

Accordingly, I think it's great that independent citizens of Muir Beach get together and work through the aforementioned channels for issues around public

transportation, highway design, and even the Park Service policy on allowing dogs off-leash. But as much as I personally care about those issues, I also recognize that they have nothing to do with our Water System, or CSD-owned easements. As much I think that the traffic patterns going down Pacific Way and the size of the Muir Beach parking lot are a problem and of great concern to many of us, the simple fact is that it makes no difference to our ability to deliver safe, clean, drinking water whether the proposed Pacific Way bridge is 15 feet or 50 feet wide.

Continuing in this vein, the MBCSD continues to focus on our “core competencies” and stick to the knitting (bad metaphor - we are NOT officially connected to the Quilters!) This is why we do not want to get involved in issues between neighbors such as tree or view ordinances; it is not our role to play King Solomon and resolve every issue that arises. Marin County (along with the California Coastal Commission) has jurisdiction over building permits, zoning laws and the like.

In general, I subscribe to the Jeffersonian view that the government which governs least, governs best. But that is just my personal philosophy.

Given that preamble, let’s get down to what the CSD actually does do. First and foremost, the CSD is responsible for our Water System. Just as MMWD (Marin Municipal Water District) services most of Marin, we operate our own independent water system, with the authority to set the rates accordingly. Note that we have no affiliation with MMWD or any other water district. Our water comes from a well located off Muir Woods Road in an area commonly known as the Barbecue Site; Muir Beach CSD actually owns a small enclave of land surrounded on one side by lands owned by the National Park Service and on the other side by Tamalpais State Park, which is a California State Park. (In fact, nearly all of the cars parked in the meadow for the Muir Beach Firemen’s Barbecue are parked on state-owned land.)

From the well, the water is pumped to the pump-house (that funky looking building near the creek opposite the volleyball court) where it is treated with chlorine as a disinfectant and sodium silicate as a means of removing the iron and other precipitates. You may have noticed that our water has gotten much clearer since we started using the sodium silicate - while the iron and manganese precipitates were not

a health risk they certainly weren’t esthetic and they did wreak havoc with the laundry. From the pump house the water goes over a mile up the hill to the Upper Storage tank. Note that now we also have the ability to pump directly to the Lower Tank as well by redirecting various valves. From the tanks, the magic of gravity delivers water to individual houses and provides sufficient water pressure.

Going back to the well, a question that arises frequently is the relationship between levels of water in Redwood Creek and our rate of pumping from the well. To the best of my knowledge, no evidence has ever been shown to prove that our water use has an effect on the creek. There are two points to consider in this - one is that our use of water (we pump about 35,000 gallons a day) is relatively miniscule in context of the entire creek. I know that 35,000 gallons sounds like a lot, but for us to lower the creek even an inch would require a lot more water diversion than that. The second point is that we are pumping from a well that is ground water in the valley of the Redwood Creek watershed - we are not pumping from the creek, although it is obvious that both are ultimately dependent on the amount of rainfall occurring in the Redwood Creek watershed coming down off the slopes of Mt. Tamalpais and surrounding hills. (Sometimes I joke with friends from over the hill telling them to not let their kids throw things into the creek at Muir Woods as I have to take a shower in that downstream.) But while there is no scientific proof that we adversely affect the level of Redwood Creek during the dry season, nonetheless we agreed with the National Park Service that we would limit water use during periods when the creek level is low.

Note that after many years, the MBCSD now has official Water Rights from the California Department of Water Resources (DWR). However, as a condition of those rights we agreed to enforce limits on water usage during times when the creek was determined to be at low levels. Frankly, I think this was a political settlement with the National Park Service, because while they don’t have the jurisdiction over the water (DWR does) they nonetheless filed as a “protestant”, and we agreed to the limits in exchange for us getting Water Rights. There are times when compromise is good. Besides, it’s not a bad idea for us to exercise conservation in our use of water.

The day-to-day operations of the well and our water system are regulated by the Marin County

Department of Environmental Services (yes, the same agency that regulates septic systems.) Accordingly, we are required to adhere to all the regulations over water systems in order to ensure public health. You should be reassured to know that on a regular basis we take water samples at various locations and send them to an independent lab to ensure that the water contains no contaminants above trace levels as set by the County.

Now we get to the fun part - the money, as in where does it come from and where does it go? We’ll start with the money we collect each month from the water bills. This money goes to keeping the water system going - salaries, maintenance, supplies, and occasional repairs. The rates are set so that the water system is run on a break-even basis; we are not making a profit, nor can water operations be subsidized by other revenues. You will also note that we collect both a 25% surcharge and a special assessment tax that is designated for the Water Capital Improvements Fund. Nothing lasts forever, and in a few years we will need to replace both water tanks, upgrade valves, replace water lines, etc. These expenditures will cost hundreds of thousands of dollars; the purpose of the Capital Improvements Fund is to ensure that when the time comes for significant upgrades (above and beyond the cost of routine repairs) that we have the money. In my opinion, to do otherwise and live “hand-to-mouth” would be irresponsible in the extreme.

The other source of income that goes into our general fund is our share of Property Taxes. There is a complex and obscure formula that determines what share we get (and don’t ask me what it is or how we can get it changed) but it is around 1%. In other words, of the Property Tax you pay, MBCSD gets around 1% and the remaining 99% goes to Marin County, where it is administered by the folks in “Big Pink” - the lovely Frank Lloyd Wright designed Civic Center. Don’t ask me what they do with it exactly, but somehow it gets apportioned out to various school districts, local agencies, municipalities, etc. FYI - the state income taxes we pay go to Sacramento to pay for state government and agencies. I shall refrain from commenting on Federal Income Tax and where that money goes - definitely out of CSD jurisdiction! Or course, we do get 100% of the special Tax assessment earmarked for the Water Capital Improvements Fund.

There is a modest source of income from renting out the community center, which helps cover some of the direct costs of the rentals (i.e. cleaning up) but the intent is not to compete with the Holiday Inn in the wedding reception business, and as such the Board has limited the number of events per month. The spirit of making the community center available for rent is to provide an affordable venue for various organizations and to share the good fortune of our location with others, but it is not a profit-making enterprise.

From time to time, the CSD is the recipient of various grants that are earmarked for specific purposes. For example, a few years ago Supervisor Kinsey provided County funds that were used for redoing the steps going down to the community center, and as a result we now have solid bluestone steps. We have also received funds from Federal Agencies (including FEMA!) which the CSD administers as well. However, note that all of these projects are related to things over which the CSD has jurisdiction, such as the Water System, or drainage down through our easements, or the community center.

A point of confusion is the relationship between the Muir Beach Volunteer Fire Department and the CSD. Effectively, they are two separate organizations and the CSD does not set policy or otherwise regulate or govern the Fire Department (and vice-versa!) However, for administrative purposes the CSD oversees grant money obtained for fire prevention purposes from various agencies and does a “pass-thru” to the fire department. As an example, the Fire Department applied for and obtained a grant to purchase a chipper and other equipment. The funds do show up on the CSD Income Statement, but the revenues always match the expenditures. In other words, we don’t use funds obtained for fire prevention to pay for other general expenses, and we don’t use any tax funds to pay for Fire Department expenses.

Note that the funds raised by the annual Muir Beach Firemen’s Barbecue go directly to the Volunteer Fire Department, and the MBCSD has no part in that whatsoever, (other than that you may see Board members being involved somehow with chicken and/or tamales.)

Last, but certainly not least, we have the Muir Beach Quilters, who through various fund-raising efforts

have contributed heavily to capital improvements of the Community Center (such as the glass roof over the deck.) These funds greatly supplement what resources the CSD has and make possible the larger projects. (In contrast to the Water System, there is no capital improvement fund for the community center.) Other local groups, such as the Muir Beach Garden Club, also contribute time and money towards the upkeep and overall esthetics of the Community Center.

By the way, the Muir Beach LAN is a privately run and maintained operation, and has no connection with the CSD. There is absolutely no commingling of funds or any subsidies to or from the CSD with the private operators of the LAN. As such they reserve the right to refuse service to anyone, not limited to those without shoes or shirt. In contrast, the CSD will deliver water up to your meter regardless of dress code.

You may have noticed that I am deliberately vague about exact dollar amounts. The purpose of this article is not to provide a detailed explanation of the

budget, but rather give the casual reader an overview of what the CSD does. (Oops - I forgot one of our most important functions is the oversight of personnel employed by the District; our District Manager, our Water Operations Manager, Bookkeeper, and other people paid by the CSD to do work.) And I'm certain that I don't need to mention that all members of the Board of Directors of the Muir Beach Community Services District receive absolutely no compensation for their services.

With this as background, and assuming that everyone is still awake after reading through to the end of this article, I would reiterate that we welcome everyone to attend the CSD Board Meetings (now being held every other month because we're so efficient and run like a well-oiled machine.) Meetings are nearly always held on a Wednesday night at 7pm at the Community Center, with notice of the exact dates always posted on the Bulletin Boards three days in advance. Bring your own favorite coffee cup.

Tour of California Strives to be First Major Cycling Race Outside Europe



Racers whiz along Highway 1 near Stinson Beach in Stage One of the 2007 Amgen Tour of California. The tour bypassed Muir Beach this year because of road construction, but race organizers say they expect next year's route to include Muir Beach.

Photograph by Doug Pensinger, 2007 Amgen Tour of California; caption text by Paul Jeschke.

Tank Antenna Not a Done Deal

By Paul Jeschke

Hold the phone. While there's talk of installing a cell phone antenna on top of the upper water tank in Muir Beach, nothing official has been agreed to or signed yet, according to the Muir Beach Community Services District, owner of the facility, and Verizon Wireless, the cellular behemoth behind the project. If the plan is approved, the local landmark will grow taller by five feet.

"That's as far as it's gone," said Steve Shaffer, CSD board president. "The proposal still has to be approved by the county at public hearings and the CSD board has to vote on it after public comment."

Shaffer and CSD District Manager Leighton Hills were approached last fall by Tom Miller, an independent contractor who scouts likely cell phone antenna sites for Verizon. He was initially interested in the lower water tank on Seacape, but after reconnoitering the area, settled instead on the upper tank because of its additional elevation, excellent coverage potential and relative ease of access. The lower tank is "set amidst several homes and would be a very difficult build," according to Heidi Flato, a Verizon public relations representative, while the upper tank "sits a little further away from surrounding homes and is fairly well camouflaged by existing trees." Telephone lines are also close.

If approved, Verizon says it will hide the phone antenna behind a screen which will "match the finish of the existing tank." The covering would allow cell phone radio signals to pass through. The company would also build a small shed at the base of the tank to hold additional equipment. The shed would "most likely be hidden out of site" away from the parking lot at the Muir Beach Overlook, Flato said.

Verizon has offered \$1,250 a month rent for tank top use and, according to Shaffer, "that's \$15,000 a year, more than we get back in property tax."

Obtaining a conditional use permit and building approval from the county could take close to nine months.

The antenna would dramatically improve cell phone service in an area extending from Diaz Ridge near the intersection of Highway One and Panoramic to Muir Woods National Monument. Current coverage in Muir Beach is from signals traveling from San Francisco's Sunset District resulting in dropped calls and confusion for emergency service 9-1-1 operators.

Proponents say there might be added benefits. Cellular transmissions need to be routed to high speed land lines. Verizon plans to install four T-1 connections which could theoretically provide additional telecommunication

services to Muir Beach, including Internet service. Hills, who with Sigward Moser operates the Muir Beach LAN high speed Internet service, said T1 service would be slower than the current system. He guessed that a commercial provider would change about double the current LAN maintenance fee of \$25 a month.

LAN reliability is difficult because of Muir Beach's rugged terrain, Hills said. But if the phone company delivered high speed Internet to homes via hard wired telephone lines, "it would definitely solve the reliability issues and free Sigward and me from a long, long string of headaches!"

Muir Beach residents do not universally support the project. Some people don't trust Verizon or local government agencies to act with the public's best interest in mind. Others worry about potential adverse health effects and are worried other cell phone providers may try to build antennas here. The CSD has received several e-mail objections to the project. "It wouldn't take very many people to kill it," Shaffer said.

"Is this the sort of thing that emits cancer-causing radio waves?" asked Julie Smith who is the closest neighbor to the upper tank. She wants to know if there is "even a slight possibility it's a health problem. If there is, we're sure against it."

Verizon representatives refused to comment directly on the radiation issue, saying only that the company builds antennas "to Federal Communications Commission standards." A website maintained jointly by the FCC and the Food and Drug Administration maintains that the strength of electromagnetic fields generated by the antenna drop off rapidly as the signal moves away. "Ground-level exposure from such antennas is typically thousands of times less than the exposure levels recommended as safe by expert organizations," according to the site, "so exposure to nearby residents would be well within safety margins."

Long time CSD critic Karla Andersdatter is convinced that the project should be scuttled. "It is my understanding that electromagnetic fields DO interact with biological fields," she said. "Maybe 20 years from now we will find that the increase in brain cancers among young people is in fact related to cell phone use."

"If somebody showed me conclusive evidence that it's dangerous, I'd be concerned, but in the absence of proof, I really don't care," said Gregory Ketchum, who lives across the street from the proposed antenna. "I don't want to be a NIMBY." He was interviewed by cell phone while returning to Muir Beach. The connection was lost mid conversation.

A Note of Appreciation for the Muir Beach LAN

By Maury Ostroff

Overall, living out here in Muir Beach surrounded by the GGNRA is wonderful. But there are a few limitations, and the one that comes to mind is the lack of mainstream communications. To address that problem, two unsung heroes in our community took it upon themselves to get high-speed Internet availability. With little or no formal experience in wireless technology, networking, LAN administration and a myriad of other acronyms and technical gobbledygook, Leighton Hills and Sigward Moser plowed ahead with a can-do spirit and made it happen.

Perhaps it's a case of "no good deed goes unpunished," because many of us have come to rely on the LAN as our sole means of connecting to the Internet, but as an IT professional, I have to say that they've done a great job, and that the overall reliability and availability of the LAN is quite good. The fact is that the LAN itself is up and running over 98% of the time, with perhaps more downtime on the south node due to the limitations of solar-powered batteries in the winter. Believe me, neither Leighton nor Sigward are anywhere close to getting rich on their endeavors, and will be lucky to someday recoup the costs of the time and money they put in for equipment to get it operational. When you consider the level of service they are providing as compared to other network providers with thousands of support staff we are very lucky to have them.

I tip my hat in appreciation.

I am aware that many of us experience a certain amount of frustration and difficulty with the connection, but it is my experience that the majority of the difficulties are due to local configuration. That is, your local PC or laptop has to be configured just so, and the internal wireless systems (within the house) tend not to be reliable, etc., etc., etc. Because I rely on the Internet so much, I have had to educate myself on basic networking, PC configuration, cabling, etc. I wish that someday the technology becomes as ubiquitous as turning on the television, but that's not the situation we're in today. Plug and Play is still not quite there, and the only thing I can recommend is that as we rely more and more on email and surfing the web that we just have to become more educated about the basics, so we can troubleshoot simple things ourselves. Maybe it's like the old days with the

original automobiles - you had to crank up the engine by hand and be a bit of a mechanic just to drive.

The question always comes up around alternatives, and this comes back to my opening observation about living out here in Muir Beach. There are two mainstream methods of connecting to the Internet today: (1) Cable Modem via your local cable company (like Comcast) or (2) DSL via the telephone company (now AT&T.) The problem is that neither is available to us - there simply is no cable and we're too far away from the telephone central office for DSL. End of story. I doubt that Comcast is going to spend the money anytime soon to bury fiber-optic cable the 6 miles over the hill from Mill Valley to Muir Beach. It's possible that the phone company might upgrade the existing copper wires, and somehow get a T1 or T3 line out here, but I wouldn't hold my breath waiting.

The simple alternative is to use dial-up over existing telephone lines using a 56K modem, but this is extremely slow for any graphics or interactive web pages. In effect, even though the modem is rated at 56k, most of the time one can only get 14K over our rustic telephone lines out here. There is also the alternative of Internet via Satellite, but I don't have personal experience with the Satellite connection so I can't comment on it.

I would also point out that the Muir Beach LAN was one of the first (and still is) community-wide wireless LANs in the country. You may have heard of other plans to bring wide-scale wireless service to cities like Philadelphia and San Francisco, but this is being done by big name companies like Earthlink and Google, who have far more resources at their disposal than Leighton and Sigward.

So once again we're back to the issue of living in wonderful but isolated Muir Beach, surrounded on all sides by either the empty ocean or lovely hillsides, but miles away from anything else. My personal belief is that within 10 years local governments will get involved in providing free wireless Internet access as a public service (as the city of San Francisco is trying to do) and that someday there might be a modest antenna atop Mt. Tam broadcasting over all of Marin. But that's just my personal speculation, and in the meantime I'm thankful we have the Muir Beach LAN.

The Critter Report

By Dave MacKenzie

Winter has eased into spring and soon we will be in the unique drought and fog combination of our local summer. Critter activity is at a maximum! Here's a status report on some of the action that has been observed (by me or by others with reliable reports).

Since the rains were early and not as heavy as last year, the Coho Salmon run was not too exciting. Still, there must have been enough fish in the creek to tempt a River Otter seen by Jim White on March 23 along the Levee Trail. Maybe the seven adult Steelhead in the front lagoon also helped lure it in.

The winter Monarchs were low this year, and unfortunately their favorite roosting trees across from the community center were cut down. Hopefully, they will find a new microclimate in our area next year. In a way, a large flight of California Tortoiseshells (a bit more drab than a Monarch, but very high in speed) compensated a bit. Around March 15, I saw California Tortoiseshells, Painted Ladies, Pipevine Swallowtails, a Tiger Swallowtail, and several tiny blue Spring Azures all in one glorious day. That warm weather hatched a lot of critters! By the way, the host plant for the California Tortoiseshell is the Blue Lilac, (*Ceanothus sp*), which began to bloom all over Muir Beach about the same time. I also saw my first dragonfly of the season, probably a California Darner (*Aeshna californica*) about the same date.

By the time you read this, the Barn Owls at the dairy, Red-Shouldered Hawks at White Way, the Spotted Owls in Muir Woods, and various Red-Tailed Hawks and Great-Horned Owls should have young birds in their nests. Next step if fledging - that first dangerous flight. I always wonder what this must be like for the owls, ravens, or Peregrine Falcons that have nested in cavities a hundred feet up the cliffs at Spindrift Point!

In mammal news, there was one report of a Mountain Lion (*Felis concolor*), seen on February 15 on Coyote Ridge by three Ocean Riders. Bonnie and I could find no scat or tracks the next day or two, but tracking was hard due to dry ground (and footprints from pet dogs illegally on the trail!). Surely would be nice if someone could snap a cell-phone photo of one of these secretive cat. Bobcats, as usual, were seen daily in Muir Beach. The one-eyed female "Bobbie" was occasionally in our backyard or deck on Starbuck, as was another lanky cat I have not seen before. Last August a very large Bobcat was found dead, apparently hit by a car near the Muir Beach Overlook. I fear it was the one my grandkids famously nicknamed "Buff Bob." A buck deer and at least one coyote were also automobile casualties recently. Please watch your speed around Muir Beach, especially at night. Your neighborhood wildlife depends on it! A pair of bold Coyotes walked



Dave MacKenzie has been a passionate advocate for nature since he was a boy growing up in the Midwest. Birding and fly-fishing were early hobbies, and have been a big part of his life for half a century. He has volunteered for the Spotted Owl monitoring program of the National Park Service for 12 years. Dave and his wife Bonnie moved to Muir Beach in 1995 after spending many years in the San Diego area. They got to know each other at a demonstration protesting underground weapons testing at the Nevada nuclear test site. They both consider themselves progressive liberal activists, a good fit for Marin! Dave's day job consists of design consulting for medical devices as diverse as HIV test kits to cancer-busting linear accelerators. He works from his Muir Beach office. Dave likes to spend his summers backpacking and fishing with any or all of his six grandchildren. His unfulfilled desire is to see and photograph a mountain lion in the wild. At this point he has only seen tracks, kills, pets and photos. Help him out with timely reports and primed cell phone cameras! Photograph by Bonnie MacKenzie

through Muir Beach on March 11 and are probably the ones many persons heard howling nightly for much of March. Maybe pups will soon replace several adults which have died. I also had a glimpse of the very old Coyote "Scarback," a female whose mate, I believe, was hit by another car about 3 years ago. This Coyote has been in the area for at least 6 years.

That's what's happening critter-wise at the beach through the end of March. So look outside and see what's up!



Bobcat Photograph by Dave MacKenzie

Natural Curiosities

By Dave MacKenzie

Q: When is the best time to see whales from Muir Beach?

(from many of my neighbors and visitors to the Muir Beach Overlook, every year!)

Although Gray Whales (*Eschrichtius robustus*) pass Muir Beach going south in January and February and then pass going north in March through May, the best time to see them here is the last week in April through the first week in May. This is for a couple of reasons. First, when the whales are heading south to Baja California for the winter, they travel pretty far from shore and are usually seen only from boats. There are various whale watching trips from San Francisco that will get you on to the whales at that time, weather permitting. Second, in the spring, the mother/calf pairs, fresh from the breeding lagoons in Baja, pass very close by the cliffs and beaches all along the coast of California. The peak in our area usually seems to be about May 1, based on my observations for the last 12 years. You could see a Gray Whale off the beach anywhere from mid-March on, and the early ones are likely males or females without calves. When the mother/calf pairs go by, the mother keeps the calf herded in close to shore so as to protect it from the occasional Orca (aka “killer whale” - especially in Monterey Bay) or Great-White Shark, one of our local specialties. The best places to watch for whales are up high: the Muir Beach Overlook or also “cow hill” (top of Coastal Fire Road south of the beach). Bring binoculars and watch for the spout; with good light you can see the blow a mile or more away. The whales may be within a few hundred feet from shore, so look in close too! We also have Harbor Porpoises year around off the beach Watch for fast but small black dorsal fins rolling near the tide and “spindrift” lines off of the point. The porpoises are almost always in pairs and only roll about twice a minute.

Q: How many kinds of owls are there in Muir Beach?

(from Jeremy Schmidt - full disclosure: one of my grandsons)

First is the well-known Great-Horned Owl, which is the “hoot owl” that we all hear and occasionally see. As many as three pairs nest around Muir Beach each



Northern Spotted Owl
Photograph by Dave MacKenzie

year. Next is the Barn Owl, which is probably nesting at the Golden Gate Stables barn again this year (look inside to the back for a nest box where an owl may be peeking out). If I expand the question a bit, to cover the Redwood Creek Watershed (up to Mt. Tam), we would of course include the famous Northern Spotted Owl, typically around Muir Woods, savior of many forests from the dreaded commercial chainsaws. The rest of the owls seen in the watershed are less well known: Northern Saw-Whet Owl (tiny, only 8 inches long) whose repetitive series of toots is often heard in winter, the Short-Eared Owl, the Long-Eared Owl (rare), the Burrowing Owl (also rare), the Barred Owl (nemesis to the Spotted Owl), the Screech Owl, and finally the Pygmy Owl (rare). Thus a total of 10 species! The only one I personally have not seen locally is the Pygmy Owl. Check them out in a good bird book. They are all amazing.

If you have a nature question, please email me at davem@micosafe-systems.com or call me at work (415.389.1456) or at home (415.389.1558).

Buster and I

By Linda Gibbs

Sometimes I look at Buster in his tank and ask myself, “How could he have lived in there all these years, 36 years to be exact?” He came to David as a baby in a small wooden matchbox, a red-eared slider turtle with a painted back. He was before my time by at least five years and was a birthday present from Gary, David’s long-time childhood friend,

I look at Buster and I see his sunbathing rock, his cave, and the deep water he swims in between the coral. He lives with six goldfish that survived his jaws and grew up to be big fish who fight him for the night crawlers I feed Buster every morning.

I dangle the earthworm in the tank, holding onto it until Buster takes the other end into his mouth and pulls. I release the worm and observe this ancient reptile tearing into this just as ancient worm. As a vegetarian, I watch as Buster eats another being’s flesh, something I stopped doing 26 years ago.

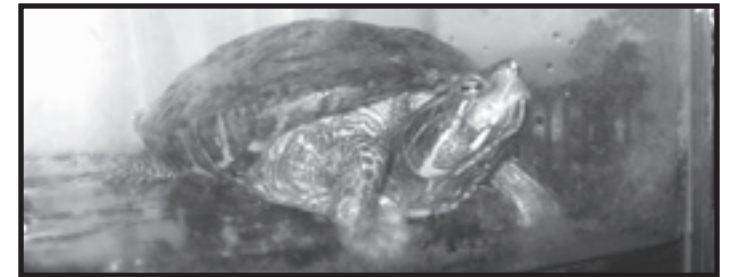
Sometimes one of the big goldfish tugs at the other end of the worm and takes it away from Buster. Buster has learned to hunker down near his cave with his “catch,” turning his back on the swirling orange fish around him.

The fish can’t chew a worm, but they try, sucking and swallowing the worm and then popping it back out when they have no way to digest it. Another fish will grab the other end of the worm and there will be a tug of war between the two fish. Buster looks on, watching his morning meal disappear. If he’s feeling feisty, he’ll come between the fish and snap the worm in two, getting his fair share.

I hang around the tank making sure Buster gets his worm. If one is lost to the fish, I feed Buster another one, digging down in the dirt of the carton to pull one up. They are strong, those worms, and even though they are slow from being in cold storage in the refrigerator, they sense their lives are at stake and respond with all the survival instincts of any species.

Recently the worms I purchased from the pet store seemed slow and unresponsive. I wondered how long they had been in the carton and didn’t feel right giving those listless creatures to Buster. I dumped the carton of dirt containing the dozen worms outside in the rose garden. The next day I inspected the mound of dirt and not a worm was in sight. I had a certain amount of satisfaction in saving a dozen worms from the jaws of my reptilian friend. Owning an omnivore can be a challenge for a vegetarian.

Buster is a female. He laid an egg 25 years ago and that’s how we found out he’s a female. (I can’t stop calling her he; Buster is Buster not Busterette.) The next step was to



Buster rests on his sunbathing rock after a tasty breakfast of earthworms. Photograph by David Leivick

buy a male red-eared slider, set up the tank with a sandy beach so Buster could crawl out of the water and lay his eggs in the sand. Basil came into the tank. He turned out to be so aggressive that he nipped at Buster’s bottom during the mating season, causing Buster to bleed. Basil performed the courtship dance by rapidly fanning his long front claws on either side of Buster’s face to signal that he was in the mood. Buster could care less and the result was a wounded bottom. We got no fertilized eggs and we returned Basil to East Bay Vivarian because of his aggressiveness. Music Masher followed Basil and Billy followed Music Masher to no avail. So much for breeding baby turtles.

When I’m feeling particularly guilty about containing such a wild creature in a confining 50 gallon tank of water, I ask David to carry Buster out to the deck on a sunny day and let him feel the sun on his back and breathe fresh air. We barricade Buster in a cardboard box, pushing the box against the railing slats. He’s restless, wanting to escape his new open-air prison. He climbs the side and, before we know it, before our eyes, he tumbles over the side between the slats and lands eight feet below in the nasturtium. We spring into action. I watch where Buster landed so we don’t lose sight of him and David runs out the front door and down the garden steps to the terraced bed in front of the trellis hiding the underside of the deck. Buster is stunned but seems okay and David brings him back inside and gently places him in the tank. Buster swims into his cave and doesn’t come out for the rest of the day.

We are worried about him. Maybe he is bleeding internally. We take him to the reptilian specialist at Berkeley Dog and Cat and place him on the large steel examination table that vets use for dogs, cats, and other mammals. Buster looks small. When the vet picks up Buster to examine him, we start to relax. Here is someone who knows how to hold and examine a reptile. We are relieved to learn that Buster is okay and are advised because of his advancing age not to change his habitat, i.e., take him outside and stress him out in a foreign environment. Keep everything the same during Buster’s golden years, the vet instructs. So that’s what we’re doing. Buster has never been outside since, which makes me feel even guiltier that he’s in this glass prison. Maybe I’ll try crickets tomorrow. Maybe Buster will like those as much as he likes the worms.

How to Help Birds During their Breeding Season



The nesting cycle for many birds in coastal California is afoot! Although the majority of birds in West Marin nest between March and July, resident species, such as Anna's Hummingbird and White-tailed Kite, begin nesting as early as January. Through research and educational outreach, PRBO is working to improve public awareness of this sensitive, critical time in a bird's life.

As you may be aware, most birds have a limited window of time for raising their young. Moreover, birds have extremely variable nesting requirements - from ground level to treetop, from open beach to brambles of vines. In fact, most birds nest within five meters of the ground.

The best way to help birds raise their young is to be mindful that during the breeding season nests are virtually everywhere where there are birds! We recommend the following actions during the breeding season:

- ✓ Evaluate your road, trail, and grounds maintenance schedule: Is your land beautiful from a bird's eyes? Leave understory vegetation whenever possible for nesting songbirds.
- ✓ Minimize disturbance by ceasing brush and dead limb cutting, mowing, trail clearing, and tree felling during the peak of breeding season: March - July.
- ✓ Set aside "no-mow" zones and leave brush piles to improve bird cover and foraging areas, and begin mowing before birds are attracted to the area and begin nesting.
- ✓ Be mindful of any alarm calls and displays (i.e., repeated sharp chipping or alert posture) that birds make when one is too close to their nest.
- ✓ Reduce feral cat populations, keep pets on leash in wild areas.

With these simple actions, neo-tropical and resident bird species alike have promise for a successful breeding season. Please feel free to contact Sue Abbott (415) 868- 1221 ext. 302, if you would like more information on PRBO's recommendations for land managers through our white paper series. We thank you for your attention.

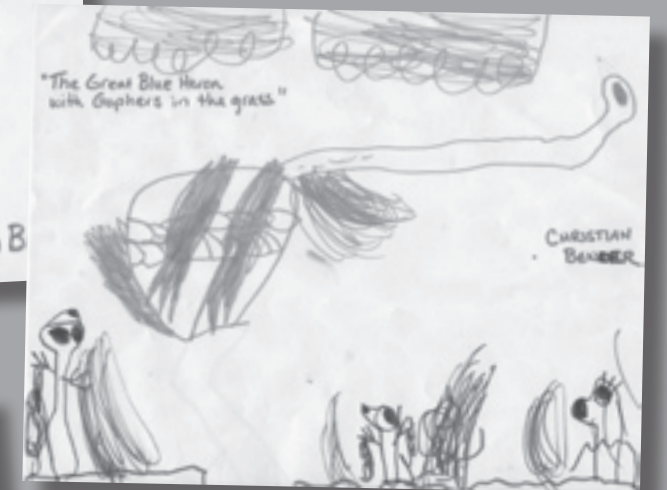


Young Artists Page

Compiled by Elisa Brooks



Adrianna Bender



Christian Bender



Lulu Georgiadis



Natalie Brooks

In Honor of National Poetry Month (April)

Compiled by Pam Barlow



Excerpts from “DIARY OF A POET:
An Imaginary Life
New and Selected Works by
Karla Andersdatter
© September, 2006,
IN BETWEEN BOOKS
Available now at The Depot Book-
store and Café in Mill Valley

A woman was calling, and her voice was a string, a long velvet string,
but the string was a sound and the sound was the woman. He could-
n’t see anything but a voice, a string of light now, a ribbon of sound
and it led to her mouth. Somewhere there was the woman he loved,
and her face appeared now, or was it only a ghost of her face?

It left him then, all the angst, terror, all the violent foreboding he wore
like a veil, like the miracle and dread of seeing the future and being
correct. It was anguish to mediate the present and past, to stand in
the center of a doorway in time.



Loving spirits who are on earth,
gentle is the touch and breath of you.

Like swallows in a silver sky
the day is gone,

One frail evening star is there
and one white branch,
bare above the copse of trees.

Bless us this day
in our travail,

the world is more than
simple hearts can comprehend.



“If St. Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle, and Jung had started writing
poetry, these are the kind of poems we would have seen.”

-- Hugh Fox, Reporter for Small Press Magazine

Hiking with my Daughter on Mount Tamalpais

By Judith Yamamoto

In and out of trees, redwood, madrone, laurel,
the smaller manzanita smell of apples.
You ahead of me on the trail, and we climb.
After the part where the soil is orange clay, the sky
comes even bluer into our eyes,
as if the light from all the little lamps
were blown into our faces.
These hills simply are.

On each rock, above the rushed and local stream,
I watch your exact footsteps. Smoke in the cabin,
and we fall out of the sky.
On the far shore, you turn to me. A thin-legged child in Zambia
holds out an empty bowl. As though
I too could cross over inconstant water, as though kindness
occurred in the blood.

On The Beach

Uncountable tiny pebbles
of many colors.

Broken seashells mixed in with whole ones.

Sand dollars, shattered and whole,
the half-gone wing of a gull.

Changed glass
that is like the heart after much pain.
The empty shell of a crab.

A child moves alone in the grey
that is half fog, half wind-blown ocean.

She lifts one pebble, another,
into her pocket.
From time to time takes them out again and looks.

These few and only these. How many? Why?

The waves continue their work of breaking
then rounding the edges.

I would speak to her if I could,
but across the distance what would she hear?
Ocean and ocean. Cry of a fish.

--Walk slowly now, small soul, by the edge
of the water. Choose carefully
all you are going to lose, though any of it would do.

Jane Hirshfield
from *The Lives of the Heart* (NY: HarperCollins, 1997)

Trying to Get Through

By Judith Yamamoto

Over and over, the egg-laying spider
runs under the stone,
the centipede floats on top of its legs.
There are a hundred reasons for the earth’s attraction,
a gravity of equatorial oceans and nights
under a hot moon.
I turn corners relentlessly. Let in the immigrant
whose boat has smashed at my door. These salt boards
stack up in my sleep, finally familiar —
houses that constrict on the wide plains.
The mercury rises above the thin red lines and we say goodbye.
Haven’t I, too, waded through rivers, run from the dogs,
trying to get through?

Journey of an Awakening Heart

By Annita Gibson

Wayne Heldt, an avid traveler, life enthusiast and local photographer, has been calling Muir Beach his home for the last 10 years. Through the lens of his camera, he captures precious moments in time with his innate ability to see exquisite beauty in all surrounds and most extraordinarily in subjects that commonly go unnoticed. Photography has long been a passion for Wayne, although he has mostly kept his work private until recently. Wayne launched his first professional exhibition with 40 photos on March 3rd 2007 at Studio 333 in Sausalito. "Images from an Awakening Heart" is an eclectic collection from his travels in Greece, Peru, the Caribbean, China and Japan, as well as the States. Wayne's "previous life" was working almost 40 years in the financial services industry.

"It was not in my retirement plan to be faced with open heart surgery three years ago, but the anticipation of that surgery and what followed afterwards, brought me to the contemplation of what was meaningful to me and what was truly close to my heart. My family and friends, as well as my love for travel, were in my heart. My love for photography led me to see more detail and meaningfulness in life. Photography has become somewhat of a metaphor for how I see more now - not only in what I can bring forth in a photograph, but in Life itself. It has resulted in my spiritual journey through the lens of the camera."

"Photography has been an evolutionary experience for me. My skill has grown as I have grown. Photography is my art, and as an artist I have deep appreciation for that which nature and man create. It has given me a renewed focus to my life, to expand awareness, to see detail otherwise missed, to record a snapshot of time, to offer images that stir me, to live in fuller disclosure of what is meaningful and how what is seen through a lens can touch, grow and heal the heart."

You can view the images from Wayne's exhibition that ran from March 3rd - April 15th at Studio 333 in Sausalito on www.wayneheldtstudio.com. All images are available through the Wayne Heldt Photography Studio website or by calling (415) 388 -1850. Please visit the website for news updates.



At the opening reception of Wayne's exhibition, "Images from an Awakening Heart," Studio 333, Sausalito. Alish Schutz is performing, in fun, an excerpt from a sacred Peruvian flower ceremony, sprinkling rose petals over Wayne Heldt in this blessing ritual.



"Survival" - Zion National Park, Utah 2003



"Waiting" - Greek island 2005

Upcoming exhibitions:

Bank of America - 60 Throckmorton Avenue, Mill Valley, CA 94941 • May 1st until June 30th 2007

Art @ Apartment A - 10 Locust Avenue, Mill Valley, CA 94941 • From May 1st Gallery hours: Tuesday - Saturday 11am - 5:30pm

Expecting to Fly again!

By Lea Wood

I am a local resident, living on Starbuck since 1998 and wanted to introduce myself. My name is Lea Wood, and I have recently started to make my ceramics again, and have my studio up and running after quite a few years. Pretty exciting stuff for me!

I began a business in the garage of my mother's Greenbrae condo, making ceramic ostrich eggs in the late 80s, and selling them to large department stores for use in their display departments. I called the line Expecting to Fly. Yes, after the Buffalo Springfield classic. These eggs were pretty wild and were hand-painted in acrylics to look like animal skins, including leopard and zebra, cow, wild birds, African mud cloths, in fact...whatever! I guess that I should add here that I am originally from Durban, South Africa.

After some success, I brought out a line of glazed, freeform dinnerware and serving pieces, and was fortunate enough to get into many decorative accessory boutiques and upscale department stores including our local Fillamento (now gone unfortunately) and Gumps. I sold nationally and internationally and it was great fun.

Having your own business is a love hate thing. It's endless and exhausting! The shows are brutal, and shipping ceramics to and from them was very tedious. After 10 years, I decided to move on. After a few other careers, I am producing, designing, and experimenting with ceramics again. I have a price list that I can email to you. If you or any friends are interested in something truly Muir Beach and original, please consider my work. It is very functional, lead

free glazes only, each piece is signed, microwavable and dishwasher safe.

The pieces are not as hefty and thick as most handmade ceramic dinnerware and serving pieces. They have a finer feel and a lighter weight to them. There are many colors and moods to choose from, some of which are listed below:

'Muir Beach' - organic influence

'Watercolors' - solid washy colors to mix and match

'Retro' - very new 50s 60s and 70s era

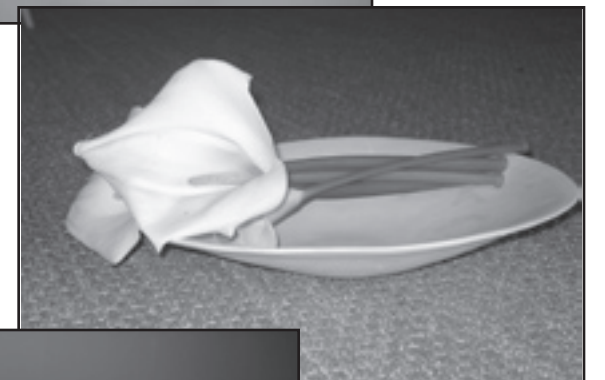
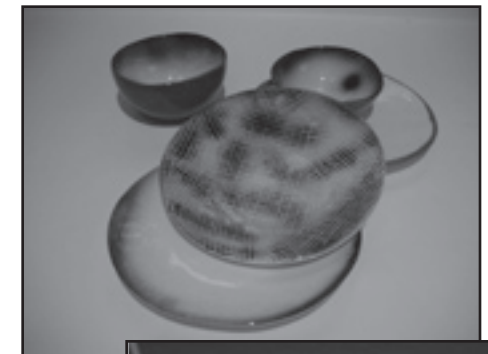
Due to the black and white format, a little imagination is going to go a long way!

Please call or email me if you are interested or have any questions. No pressure!

Thanks for your interest. Lea

415 399-0467 H 415 518-9663

pleawood@yahoo.com



Photographs of serving pieces by Peter Wood



Lea Wood

Photograph by Peter Wood

Antarctica

By Gerry Pearlman

It was not my intention to go to Antarctica when I set out from Muir Beach seeking love and adventure. My destination was only Argentina where a friend had an apartment that I could rent for a month or so, and where I might learn how to tango a bit. But I stopped in New York on my way to ensure I would at least start my quest for love and adventure with the already existing love of a dear friend. One night while having dinner

with some other acquaintances of my friend, and discussing my upcoming trip to Argentina, they began to wax ecstatically about a town called Ushuaia, Russian research vessels, and glaciers calving mile long icebergs into the sea. Well from that moment on my fate was sealed and Antarctica began to exert an almost gravitational pull which naturally only increased the nearer I got to it.

It didn't take long once I reached Buenos Aires to realize that living at Muir Beach for so long where the air arrives fresh off the ocean and there are no commercial establishments, has given me a low tolerance for cityscapes. Even the great cities of the world, which Buenos Aires certainly is, make me uncomfortable. I am no longer accustomed to dirt and noise, crowds and the restless energy that the concentration of masses of people inevitably produce. Despite the high culture and endless variety of everything, the environment invariably begins to oppress me after a short while. Modern technology via the Internet now delivers most of this culture and diverse excitement to us wherever we are at any rate, albeit virtually. But as long as the major metropolitan areas hold the monopoly on where the jobs and opportunities exist, they will continue to attract endless multitudes from the countryside where these things are in short supply, if they exist at all.

So it was not too long before the pull of Antarctica became stronger. And my seemingly two left feet encountering the precision of the tango helped as well. It is interesting to find a city so preoccupied with a single dance. Wherever you go here, you feel the presence of the tango via signs, posters, shows, lessons, and people from the young to ancient



Gerry Pearlman standing on the frozen continent of Antarctica, taking in the icy whiteness.

actually dancing it. Perhaps Vienna was this way during the heyday of the waltz, but I don't think you can find such a phenomenon of a single dance having such a profound cultural impact on a place anywhere else today. By way of analogy, it would be like jazz which similarly had its origin in the brothel culture of the time, became the dominant music in any American city.

So I took a break from my tango lessons, eschewed the challenge of the 36 hour bus trip necessary to reach Ushuaia from Buenos Aires and found a seat on Aerolinas Argentinas which got me there in three hours. Not as easy as it sounds, since these flights are always full, causing me to arrive 6 hours in advance of my luggage. Any warm clothes I had were in my bag since I was leaving a very hot climate in the summertime north. I had, as well, inadvertently packed my wallet and credit cards in the bag. The airline made a halfhearted attempt to deal with my problem which was actually their problem, giving up after a short time, and offering to pay for a taxi to a hotel if I could find one myself. Again not an easy task as it was the high season for all the tourists heading to Antarctica. But I was lucky to find a bed after a few tries and headed off in my shirtsleeves and taxi. Upon arrival and explaining the situation, the owner of the place lent me a heavy jacket and even some shoes and socks to replace my open sandals. My bag arrived 6 hours later by taxi as well.

So now all that remained was the booking of a passage to Antarctica. In travel as in life itself getting good information is no easy task, but obviously necessary to make informed decisions. I did not want to go on one of the cruise ships since my previous experience of them always seemed a bit like incarceration. Try

as I might I could find nothing smaller than a cruise ship with 70 other people from all over the place. Somewhere along the way I had been apprised of the "last minute deal" phenomenon whereby the price of the voyage is reduced by as much as half in order to fill up any vacancies aboard. Still the \$3600 price tag was a bit daunting for me despite the fact that the majority of other passengers having booked a long time in advance were paying nearly double that price. I had to make a wager that what I knew about cruise ships and guided tours would be trumped by the experience of Antarctica itself.

So betting what I knew to be true against what I did not know, I booked my passage with echoes of all around me claiming this to be the trip of a lifetime. I have always wanted to see an iceberg with my own eyes. I've always loved the desert as well and Antarctica has often been described as the crystal desert. Still in the back of my mind is all that time confined to one space with essentially redundant views and listening to relatively unimaginative lectures. I am thinking that I am going to lose this bet. I will be bored and I will waste a lot of money.

But then maybe it will not be an either/or experience. Some of it will be boring for sure but some of it will be good as well. What becomes clear is that I must take on the wager having come this far to the bottom of the world. To feel my resources wasted on something not worth the effort would not be good, but not to

have taken the chance that something worthwhile perhaps awaited me out there would be even worse, for then I would never know.



The docile penguin looks out to sea.

I had two days before sailing and spent them in a rather nice national park outside of Ushuaia and on a nearby glacier. Then it was time to go and I reported to the cruise ship at the appointed time ready to embark. Upon first glance I was not exactly thrilled at the sight of my fellow passengers. People who go on such excursions are generally old, retired, and possessed of sufficient funds so as not to have to think about it as much as I did. The conversation inordinately turns to where are you from, where have you been, and where are you going with the odd bit of dining experience thrown in. Then you must explain yourself which has never been an easy or interesting task for me having led such an unusual life of diverse experience. But when all was said and done, though I would not have chosen to spend time with the likes of them on shore, they were not a bad bunch. Amongst

whom were a federal bank examiner, a retired lawyer cum traffic court judge, a teacher/administrator of a California community college, two engineers - mostly all retired. Representatives from Canada, UK, Australia and the US from the English speaking crowd as well as people from Austria, Italy, Poland, Brazil. My favorites turned out to be a couple from Oxford who knew an awful lot about every thing we were seeing since he had taught biology there, but was now head mastering a school in Chile. It was from him I learned the extraordinary fact that there are



Multitudinous penguins of Antarctica finishing off their breeding cycles on land before returning to the sea.



Over 70% of the world's fresh water is concentrated in the frozen masses of Antarctica.

species of whales existing today that no one has ever laid eyes on. I must confess that having a hearing disability does not make socializing any easier. The din of ambient noise in the ship's dining room where most conversation took place made me only able to hear half of what was being said to me at best.

It took two days solid sailing to get across Drakes Passage—a distance of 950 miles. It was a calm crossing going, but the last day coming back was more interesting with 80 mile an hour winds churning up the ocean and rocking the boat considerably. My sea legs are good so it didn't bother me at all, but many of the other passengers were severely discomforted. Most of the time it was overcast so no stars were visible throughout the trip. A pity because evidently the air is generally so clean in the polar region that astronomers like to set up their telescopes around the south pole. There was something about the air that was extraordinary and definitely different from anything I knew previously. I suspect I was getting a lot more energy from it but can't explain it further than being very salubrious due to its purity.

The approach to Antarctica is generally via the Shetland Islands, a small Archipelago shielding the Antarctic peninsula jutting out from the main continent. With more ice free land mass, its islands served as the location of the whaling and sealing industry's voracious quest for profit well into the 20th century. It's hard to think kindly about oil these days but its advent in our time did much to save the whales from extinction. Seeing the remains of these stations and their rendering implements, one can only imagine the existence of hell.

But here we had our first encounter with penguins and their docility and humorous appearance soon erased any images of bygone killing grounds. Vast numbers of them were on land now finishing off their breeding cycles, their chicks in various stages of molting, and getting ready for their first swim in the return to the sea. It is at that moment that they are particularly vulnerable to the leopard seal who knows exactly when that moment arrives and has a relatively easy job of satisfying his appetite. Another danger confronting the penguin chicks (not pups as one

would think since they are still considered birds) is another bird as nasty as its name—Skua. They police the penguin colonies like wardens of a prison filching an egg from a nest, distracting the parent so the chick is separated and becomes easy prey for their sharp beaks. After a certain point in the struggle between adult penguin and Skua, the penguin seems to inexplicably give up, leaving their offspring to a certain and heart wrenching end.

The main varieties of penguins encountered were Gentu, Pinstripe, and Adeli with the odd Macaroni thrown in for good measure. Leopard, Crabeater, Fur and Elephant seals were commonly seen as well as precious minutes worth of cavorting Humpback whales with the smaller Minkes less willing to display. But for sheer numbers it was penguins on nearly every landing in Antarctica which we did reach after a day or two in the Shetlands. I have to admit that there is something to first setting foot on this frozen continent but I am at a loss to explain exactly what it is—a little bit of magic buried in the privacy of one's mind. Perhaps because there is so little there in the icy vastness. Moss, lichen, two flowering plants which strain the eye to see, nesting petrels and comorants and the multitudinous penguins. Obviously there is a lot more going on that is not visible to the naked eye, but it is the icy whiteness that soon overwhelms.

It takes a long time for penguins to become tiresome because their funny way of waddling around with their flippers outstretched is so amusing. Later it occurred to me that Charlie Chaplin must have taken his cues from this source. It also occurred to me that if we were not so accustomed to walking on flat surfaces of which there seem to be none in all of Antarctica, then we too might have embraced the waddle as

our normal gait. In any event the limited variety of penguin behavior patterns, which become familiar soon enough, soon lead to diminishing interest. Six days of them were quite enough for me along with visits to the Argentine, American, and UK research stations. In fact the ten day, eleven night journey was a bit too long for me—seven would have suited me better but with four days devoted to crossing Drakes Passage, tour operators naturally feel more time is needed on the continent itself. But because of the severity of the landscape and the limited flora and fauna, it doesn't require much time to take it all in as a tourist. Researchers with their ability to look deeper with their instruments and the old time adventurers like Scott and Shkelton testing their ability to endure and go beyond the limited knowledge of the continent at the time need all the time they can get. For me just looking at everything soon wears thin.

A word about the American research station with a budget of \$500 million. Its funding comes by way of a federal agency I had never heard of before called the National Science Foundation somehow seated in the Executive Branch of government. I could not make any connection with the present administration's interest in scientific research in Antarctica, but it is a not insignificant government contract to be let. Raytheon, one of our leading defense contractors, is the recipient. A further aside is the fact that this particular station (there are two others) unbelievably does not treat its human waste but empties it into the pristine bay on which it is located. And while I'm at it I might as well mention the failed nuclear reactor that was placed in one of the stations.

For the rest of the group the main activity engaging their interest was recording whatever we encountered with an array of cameras the likes of which I had never seen collected in one spot. Each of my fellow 80 passengers had at least one camera mostly of the digital variety, and some had two with very imposing lenses. Given the capacity of digital imaging I can only guess at the number of photos taken, but it would most probably be not too far off to say somewhere in the vicinity of 5000. Not having a camera myself naturally hastened my encroaching disenchantment. I have been in many beautiful places and Antarctica certainly stands out among them. Icebergs and the various sculptured smaller floating pieces were a delight to my eye, but it was not a never ending delight (I hardly know what would be). Another startling fact

emerged in that over 70% of the world's fresh water is concentrated in these frozen masses—more than the rest of the world combined. And I used to scoff at the idea of some desert monarch to tow icebergs to relieve his parched land.

Another sight deserving mention was that of the Wandering Albatross and Royal Petrel, seemingly defying limitations of energy with their graceful manipulation of wind and wave mile after mile in the wake of the boat. The wingspans of 12 and 10 feet are more impressive in the imagination than seen from a distance, but the effortless gliding is indeed incredible. I'm not sure that even the most sophisticated computers could be programmed to take into account all the information necessary to produce such effortless flight while taking in the vagaries of wind and wave.

I was glad we were at the end of our journey, as the pilot vessel guided us gently back into the port of Ushuaia. It is hard to put a value on the experience. I do not regret having done it. It might have been better and it could have been a lot worse. I am not cut out to be a mere tourist led from one spot to another and lectured to about what is being shown to me. I need more of a personal challenge to get really engaged. Still I do not regret the experience. One which has grown from something allowed to very few in the time of the early explorers only a hundred years ago, to one that is becoming more accessible with each passing moment. The British station is no longer a research station, but now serves as a privately endowed museum of what was once the station doing research, and it had already been visited by 11,000 people during its 3 month summer season. For me the journey continues from a near freezing Antarctica back to a sweltering Buenos Aires.

What do you think of what I think—easily revealing more about me than about Antarctica!



One of the various sculptured and smaller floating icebergs of Antarctica.



Photographs by
Julie Smith



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