

# BEACHCOMBER

SINCE 1946





## Inside

Rodoni Asks for Volunteers .....	3
Paul Smith performance, March 26 .....	3
Beachcomber Financials .....	4
Field of Dreams - correction .....	4
Valentine Treat at MBCC .....	5
Book Review .....	5
The Critter Report .....	6
Dark Waters .....	7
Can you guess who this is? .....	7
Holiday Arts Fair Thank You .....	8-9
Yes to Microchips for Pets .....	9
A Toast to Suzanne Miller .....	10-11
The Boys in the Truck .....	12-14
Llamas on Muir Beach .....	15
48th Annual Firemen's BBQ .....	15
Can you guess who this is? Answer ...	15
Fire Diaries .....	16-17
Muir Beach Fire Update .....	18
Weekend Woodworker .....	19-20

*Beachcomber* is a community newsletter published quarterly by and for residents, friends, family and former residents of Muir Beach. Published since 1946 (on and off), circulation 160 (more or less).

Submissions may be sent to the **Beachcomber mailbox** on mailbox row or emailed to **editor@muirbeachcomber.com**

Contribute your essays, poems, stories, photographs, artwork, announcements, reviews and kid stuff – anything that celebrates Muir Beach and our community.

Everything printed should be considered solely the opinion of the writer and printed in the form and condition as submitted.

Beachcomber exercises no editorial control over content or distribution, except for readability and general appearance.

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## Jewelry and Metal Arts Exhibition



*Charlene Modena*

Muir Beach artist and Director of the School of Jewelry and Metal Arts at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, Charlene Modena, presented a major exhibition of emerging designers at the Academy during November, 2019.

In addition to the students, Charlene's work was also on display, with a lovely staircase as an outstanding piece. Charlene's work has been exhibited and collected both nationally and internationally.



A number of Muir Beach residents attended the opening reception on November 7th.

For more information about Charlene and photos of some of her sculpture and jewelry, please see [www.charlenemodena.com](http://www.charlenemodena.com).

—Anne Jeschke

## SAVE THE DATE March 13th Community Dinner

*By Marilyn Laatsch*

The Elderberries say: Coming March 13th! Save the date for the next Community Dinner sponsored by the Elderberries! Join us for fantastic food, atmosphere, no speeches, and good friends. Menu and more information coming soon, but for now, save March 13th from 6:30 onward.

### ON THE COVER

*Free Range Bocce*

Ink and watercolor  
6" x 4"

Brad Eigsti

Brad has lived in Muir Beach for the past 20 years and is grateful everyday to call this place home.

Drawing and painting have been an integral part of his life, with many travel journals filled with art. Plein aire sketching enforces the attention to detail and provides a framework for recalling spaces, landscapes, places, people and memories.

Brad owns and operates Imprints Landscape Architecture, designing and drawing plans throughout the Bay area.

For fun, Brad can be found mountain biking, hiking, volunteering with the fire department, playing beach bocce ball, Thursday night volleyball, walking the dog to the overlook for sunset, going to concerts and hanging out at local events.

Brad lives with his wife Lisa and daughters Hannah (16), Stella (12) and dog Luna.

# Rodoni Asks For Community Volunteers

*By Paul Jeschke*

Muir Beach residents have an opportunity to help shape the future of short-term vacation rentals in our community.

Supervisor Dennis Rodoni is looking for volunteers to join an existing working group of Muir Beach residents seeking to identify issues surrounding short-term rentals and to subsequently recommend solutions to the Marin County Board of Supervisors. Whatever happens, Rodoni stressed in the interview, we must have community support and pass the scrutiny of a supervisors' subcommittee and eventually the California Coastal Commission.

Noting that there are passionate opinions on a multitude of issues with vacation rentals such as noise and parking, Rodoni said one of the first tasks is to identify the number

of rentals and specific problems associated with them. Operators of short-term rentals are required to register with the county and collect a transient occupancy tax. Records show 14 units registered in Muir Beach, though some community members have estimated there are as many as 50 or 60.

Some individuals have cited estimates that as much as 60 percent of Stinson Beach properties are vacation rentals and they lament a perceived loss of community involvement when longtime renters are displaced. Others stress that added rental income by renting out a room or two makes it possible for them to remain in Muir Beach and afford high mortgage payments. Various compromise scenarios have been suggested including a requirement that the owner of a short-term rental must live on the

property. But that proposal, Rodoni said, might mean that an owner would need to add a bedroom which, in turn, might trigger a requirement to add a costly septic system. Any limitation would need a stamp of approval from the Coastal Commission which has a mandate to facilitate coastal visitation.

"I don't have the solution," Rodoni said. "There isn't a magic wand to solve this." Acting on the assumption that good neighbors can work things out, Rodoni will meet with the Muir Beach short term rental committee, probably during an evening in April, to scope out a plan to fact find and gauge community sentiment. Any Muir Beach resident interested in participating should contact the supervisor's assistant, Rhonda Kutter, by telephoning (415) 473-3246 or by email at [rcutter@MarinCounty.org](mailto:rcutter@MarinCounty.org).

## Paul Smith Performance – March 26

*By Bernard Halliwall*

Paul Smith will come to the Community Center on March 26th at 7 pm to present, in a solo piano recital, the music that was performed at the time of Beethoven's death. The program will include music by Liszt, Mendelssohn, Chopin, Schumann, and Czerny.

Paul Smith has been bringing music to the Community Center at least since 2015. The programs differ each time. Perhaps a pianist or a chamber group. Perhaps a performance of vocal music. Paul always introduces the music, and so one learns a little along the way. His programs are varied, interesting, and world-class, and in spite of all that they are presented free of charge.

These performances are a treasure, because listening to finely performed music in an intimate setting close to home is an activity that enhances the quality of life in a way that perhaps no other activity can.

I always arrange my calendar to make sure that I can attend. Frequently I invite friends for a light meal before hand, and then we saunter down to the Community Center. I remember one concert was canceled because the man delivering the piano died. I was quite disappointed, so I ran up to Point Reyes Station where the same concert was going to be presented a few days later. The program included Bartok's masterpiece "Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion," performed by Valeria Szervanszky

and Ronald Cavaye. The concert was fantastic and led me to reconsider Bartok's oeuvre. At another concert, the violist had recently retired from the San Francisco Symphony. There he was, playing his violin three feet away from where I sat. I had never been so close in Davies Symphony Hall.

Paul has spent years bringing interesting music to small venues. He is originally from Fort Worth, he studied at the Royal College of Music in London, the Vienna Hochschule for Music, and Dominican College. He has taught at the College of Marin, and he was awarded the Sali Libermann Award for contributions to the cultural life of Marin County.

# Beachcomber Financial Report 2020

By Maury Ostroff

Thanks to all who donate to the Beachcomber, we continue to be on solid financial footing. A big Thank You to everyone who has paid their membership for the year.

The Beachcomber operates on a financial model similar to PBS; we rely on donations which we euphemistically call annual memberships, but we distribute a printed copy to every mailbox in Muir Beach whether they have donated or not. (Just like you can still watch or listen to Public Broadcasting without having to respond to any of their many pledge drives.)

The table below shows how much money has been raised each year starting with the year 2014, when the new Beachcomber team took over. The last row shows how much was received for the most recent appeal, (even if the donation itself came in 2020.) The Average \$ per Donation is generally above \$25 because we have many people who give more, sometimes \$50 and even \$100. Even the Pelican Inn donated \$100! Once again, a big Thank You for everyone who has contributed not only this year but in other years as well.

Year	\$ Amount	Number of Donations	Average \$ per Donation
2014	\$3,100	83	\$37
2015	\$2,005	59	\$34
2016	\$1,850	51	\$36
2017	\$125	5	\$25
2018	\$1,655	40	\$41
2019	\$2,445	62	\$39

For those who are reading the details in the data, we did not have a membership solicitation in 2017 because we missed a few issues in 2017 and early 2018.

We have found a new printer that only charges about \$400 per issue, where each issue is generally 16 or 20 pages and only the cover is in color. (Previously we have used various printers that have charged more.) There are very few incidental expenses, as all the labor done by the Beachcomber staff is volunteer. Perhaps if we raised more money we could look into printing all pages in color. The current balance in our bank account is \$3,400 which is sufficient to keep us going with enough in reserve.

There are just over 150 houses in Muir Beach, and over 160 mailboxes. There are some cases where we put more than one when there is more than one household sharing a mailbox, which is one of the reasons why we try to print a few extra copies to handle special requests. However, there are also a fair amount of mailboxes that do not get a copy; there are ones that are so stuffed full of junk mail and flyers that are weeks and months old and obviously weathered, so it's clear no one is actually living there. Bottom line, it's just easier to use common sense and put one in every mailbox that is obviously being used and avoid meticulous record-keeping of individual subscriptions. And who knows, perhaps someone who may have not been interested in the past will see something worthy of note and attend an event or even make a donation!

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## Field of Dreams – a Correction

Regarding the Field of Dreams article in the last issue, (*Beachcomber* November 2019, page 16). One item in the otherwise brilliant and thoroughly enjoyable visit into past memories of our common history comes at the end of the first paragraph which incorrectly states:

**This is the story of the Muir Beach Fog, the only competitive sports team Muir Beach has ever fashioned.**

While certainly the best and most inclusive sports team Muir Beach has ever fielded, it was not the only one. The December edition of the 1982 Coastal Post attests to the fact that a team (mostly derived from the Muir Beach Volunteer Fire Dept.) bravely ventured forth to Stinson Beach to challenge their volunteer firemen for the perpetual trophy. The headline stated: **Stinson Hoselayers edge Muir Beach in billiards shoot-out of the season**

Well it was a hard fought battle and we did end up losing by a short margin. Unfortunately plans for an eight ball pool league never materialized. Our pool table which formally occupied the top floor of the present GGNRA temporary fire barn, now resides in the Piotter's garage.

–Gerry Pearlman



# Valentine Treat at Community Center

By Paul Jeschke

Music will fill the air at a special Valentine's Day treat at the Community Center on Friday, February 14. Keyboardist Durand Begault and drummer Larry Lasky are performing at a free concert, the second in a series of "Café Muir" musical events organized by the Elderberries.

The 90-minute event starts at 7:30 pm. Seating is at small, candle-lit tables to create an atmosphere of jazz

club intimacy, according to Marilyn Laatsch, one of the event organizers.

The Elderberries will provide light snacks. Guests are encouraged to bring their own beer, wine or other beverages, though Begault pledges to start the night out with a bottle of cheap gin to loosen the crowd up because "the more you drink, the better we sound."

It's a "one foot lounge" act, Begault said of the duo's musical style, "sort of a cross between Jerry Lee

Louis and Carman Cavallero." He describes his own sound as "part Bert Bacharach, Bill Evans and Cuco Valdez."

Muir Beachers lucky enough to have heard Durand and Larry play together previously predict a lively performance guaranteed to get the joint jumpin'. The Starbuck Drive neighbors will be improvising many of the numbers. "We don't have to practice," the keyboardist said. "We play it right the first time." Ask for requests, "we'll make an attempt."

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## Book Review

By Gary Friedman

*The World Could be Otherwise: Imagination and the Bodhisattva Path* by Norman Fischer

Daily we are bombarded with news of what terrible shape the world is in. Climate change, public discourse filled with accusations, blame, dishonesty, a huge economic and racial divide that is splitting our country apart, impeachment of the president of our country, threats of war just to name a few, roil our lives constantly with hardly a chance to catch our breaths before receiving the next onslaught. How do we restore sanity to our everyday lives, never mind the planet?

One way is to read Norman Fischer's latest book, *The World Could be Otherwise: Imagination and the Bodhisattva Path*. It might sound like this is a way to escape the world. In fact, it's not. It is a way to find a stance in relation to the world that provides us with hope, wisdom and a realistic way for us to live our lives that is practical and stabilizing. And indispensable to engage with the world.

Recognizing the basic reality that we want so much to be able to change others, which mostly results in frustration and much gnashing of the teeth, Norman's prescription for how we can conduct our lives begins with the reality that while we can't necessarily successfully change the world, we can change ourselves, that is, our attitudinal stance that only compounds our misery.

We can achieve this change through the Imagination, which possesses the power to "lighten up the heavy circumscribed world we think we live in." It is through choosing a spiritual path that we can expand our hearts and minds. Fischer explains that imagination is the source of understanding who we really are and is deep and wide enough to open us to the profound healing that comes from compassion.

Using everyday non-esoteric language that anyone can understand, Fischer charts a roadmap that we can follow that creates sustainability, courage and plain sense to guide us through these rough times.

Finding and developing our aspirations through the Buddhist path is not only imaginative but also down to earth. The "six perfections", taken from Mahayana Buddhism represent a pathway to improve ourselves as human beings functioning in the world as it is. Generosity, ethical conduct, patience, joyful effort, meditation and understanding are all described in plain spoken, clear language with practices to guide us through the difficult challenges of our lives.

Norman has lived in Muir Beach for several decades after having been abbot at Zen Center living at Green Gulch for many years. He is the founder and central teacher of Everyday Zen where he has taught thousands of practitioners. In addition to having written many books, Norman is also a poet. Many of his teachings, including guided meditations can be found at [Everydayzen.org](http://Everydayzen.org).

# The Critter Report

By Dave MacKenzie

As the Rolling Stones sang in their 1967 song:

*"Connection, I just can't make no Connection, but all I want to do, is to get back to you."*

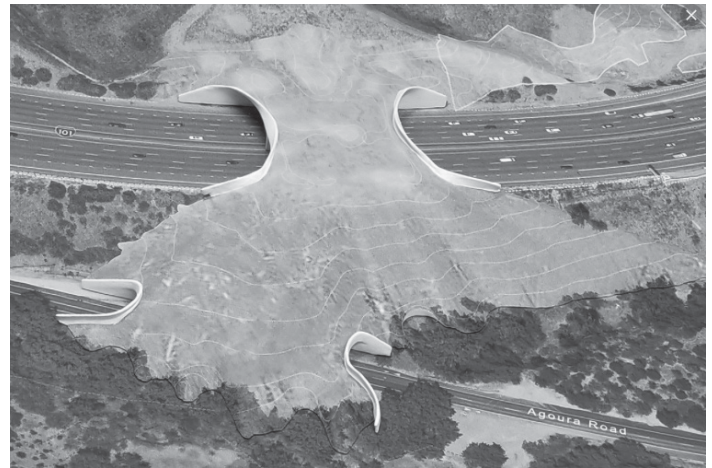
Well, just like Keith Richards, our local critters need to have connections in life. First is the need to move across the landscape to find food, and the other is to find mates. Wildlife biology 101.

Speaking of 101, we now know, based on real data, that Hwy 101 in Marin is high risk crossing for deer and other wildlife. We have all seen a roadkill or two (or smelled that crushed skunk aroma), but the folks and citizen scientists supporting CROS, the California Roadkill Observation System out of UC Davis have been documenting roadkills in California for over a decade. Citizen scientists (like me, for a few years) enter observations and other evidence, such as photos, into a web database which is then converted into an overall map to find wildlife high risk hot spots. Looking at the map for Marin, Hwy 101 is, not surprisingly, a high risk crossing for the critters just trying to do their thing.

Looking at the map for Muir Beach, it is clear that our major local hotspot is Hwy 1 north from the Pelican Inn up the switchbacks toward Overlook Drive. No surprise here, either. I have personally seen deer, coyote, bobcat, raccoon, barn owl, and skunk kills along this stretch. And there was even a horse kill years ago. Shoreline near Tam Junction also stands out.

So how can we make our vehicle travels safer for wildlife? In some areas the issues are so profound, that wildlife overpasses and underpasses are being built to encourage critters to move safely. In Wyoming, for example, the annual Pronghorn migration from Jackson Hole to Pinedale is now facilitated by several large overpasses across a busy highway. Fences guide the animals (including lots of deer) across safely. In northern India, Elephant underpasses have been constructed to prevent pachyderm/auto conflicts. In the past, Elephants have sometimes become impatient with the gridlocked (and very small) Indian cars, and simply stepped on and crushed them to make the crossing.

In southern California, the Ventura Freeway (also Hwy 101) has been blocking wildlife for decades



*Proposed plan for Liberty Canyon Overpass*

from making safe crossings out of the Santa Monica Mountains. The few Cougars living in the area are facing extinction without more gene flow from the north, and so the world's largest overpass is planned for Liberty Canyon. It will be 200 feet long and 165 feet wide and act like a natural setting (complete with local plants and soil substrate), and hopefully the cats, coyotes, deer and other fauna will use it every day and night. Such overpasses have been successful around the world, such as a famous one in Banff National Park, where bears, moose, and elk are regular customers. By the way, pretty much every freeway underpass in California is now equipped with Trail Cams, so a lot of data on wildlife (and humans) is being recorded.

I am pretty sure that we won't get an overpass across Hwy 1 near the Pelican Inn anytime soon. But I know that many animals use the area to cross out and back from the Redwood Creek riparian habitat to the hills and ridges nearby.

So what can we do? First, be aware and alert for wildlife, particularly when you are driving at night. Hitting a deer can be expensive for the car owner, no to mention potentially lethal to both the human occupants and the deer. Secondly, we can slow down. The speed limit at the Pelican Inn is 35 miles/hour, but many cars go faster. Expect the unexpected in these high wildlife areas.

So give our critter neighbors a better chance for a safe and full life. Try Zen driving: pay attention more to your surroundings, and not just think about your destination or your plans for dinner!

Our critters thank you!

# Dark Waters: A Muir Beach Connection

By Bernard Halliwell

Dark Waters, a film about corporate greed, malfeasance and groundwater contamination in Parkersburg, West Virginia, from a chemical association with the production of Teflon has recently been released. This film is directed by Todd Haynes and stars Mark Ruffalo and Anne Hathaway. It is based upon the memoir *Exposure* written by Robert Bilott, the lawyer who battled du Pont for twenty-four years, as well as a cover article that appeared in the New York Times Magazine in January 2016.

When one hears these stories of corporate wrong-doing and unforgivable environment contamination, the stories often seem to happen far away and involve people we do not know. In this case there is a Muir Beach connection. Ronald Halliwell who lived in Muir Beach between 1983 and his death in 2000 worked for du Pont in Parkersburg, West Virginia for 28 years. He was a chemist and his work, highly awarded, involved the process of making Teflon, among other plastic resins. His sons grew up there, and three sons (Bernard, David, and Paul) now live at 38 Seacape Drive.

What happened was this: DuPont produced Teflon in its Washington Works plant in Parkersburg. Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), also known as C-8, is used in the production of this well known plastic. PFOA is a man-made chemical that is toxic and does not break down. For years du Pont dumped this by-product into the Ohio River, but eventually, realizing

that this dumping was a problem, someone at du Pont decided to bury the waste in land near the plant that had been purchased for that purpose. Eventually cows in the neighboring land began developing strange cancers and dying. And so the story and the film begin to unfold. Birth defects and cancers and rotting teeth were noticed. And in the long course of legal challenge, the largest epidemiological study in history was carried out, linking the contamination to cancers, birth defects and other diseases.

Here are a few anecdotes that may be of interest. Bernard had a job at Washington Works during a summer after starting college. He was asked to handle barrels of waste, undoubtedly PFOA, without any protection, of course. In the film in the opening scene, some young people climb over a fence to go skinny dipping. In real life, David had a job to put up that fence when the land was first purchased by du Pont. In the film there is a fellow Buckeye, who is one of the actual people born with a facial defect.

After seeing the film on opening

night, David commented, "I went to school with a guy who looked like that."

For the Halliwell brothers questions will remain unanswered. Was their father aware of what was happening? Probably not, but he knew that toxic chemicals were used in the process. How did things get out of control? du Pont was viewed in the community as a benevolent company. They did not fire people, they paid well, and they donated money to the community. But obviously the company was not what it appeared to be. One cannot help but feel that human organizations get out of control unless whistle blowers step forward. And, of course, where was the EPA?

You will continue to hear about the issue of water contamination. In the East Bay Express, January 15-21, 2020, there was an article, "The Coming National Water-Quality Crisis: New California testing guidelines that take effect this month are expected to reveal widespread groundwater contamination from the chemicals associated with Teflon." We all need to be aware.

## Can you guess who this is?



*See page 15 for answers.*



# Muir Beach Holiday Arts Fair – Thanks to the Dedicated Volunteers

*By Laurie Piel*

How can I thank all of the people who helped to make this such a great fair? It's a labor of love from the community and somehow a simple thank you seems insufficient and yet it's all I've got. With the loss of Suzanne Miller so many people stepped up to help and fill in the gaps that I will be eternally grateful.

For those who are new to the beach, all of the profits from the fair go to our CSD and are dedicated for use for community events only.

I'd like to start by saying that without the press there would be no patrons. Denise Lamott's publicity was spectacular...can you believe we were in the Sunday NY Times SF/Arts pull out section? I'm still reeling from that. Still talking publicity...Debra Allen not only took care of the printing of the flyers, she took over the distribution as well...what a job well done! And once again, Janet Tumpich Moore created a stunning flyer...she is so talented!

The fair itself has four "spheres of influence." Let's start with the kitchen. Kasey Corbit assumed the responsibility for the kitchen and continued the all donations system started last year. Even the hot dogs were donated...LOL! Our food donations came from Michael Caulfield, Chris Gove, Joey Groneman, Carol Gross, Leigha Heydt, Anne & Paul Jeschke, Marilyn Laatsch, Gabriel Leis, Charlene Modena, Julie Smith, Nina Vincent and myself. Everyone loved the variety of options offered again this year. Kasey's team of Debbie Dybsky, Leigha Heydt, Gail High, Anne & Paul Jeschke, Janice Kubota,

Marilyn Laatsch, Melissa Lasky, Sonia Martin, Yeschi Neumann, Trish McCall and Rebecca Sharpless ran like a well-oiled machine. It was great to see new residents learning and sharing the responsibilities with the old hands. Watching the next generation of volunteerism rise is good for the soul.

Next I'd like to thank Alexis Chase who took on the Junior Artisans table without batting an eye so close to her Winter Solstice Celebration (which was amazing, as always). Nicki Clark, Darcy Fitzpatrick, Lotta Cole Havatny, Leigha Heydt, Danny Hobson and April Randle rounded out her team. The junior artisans had some of the most fun items for sale. Make sure you visit their table next year.

Thanks are always in order to Brenda Kohn who has run Café Q for years without breaking a sweat. She and Lonna Richmond create a little spot of respite from the busy main floor. She even provides the coffee for the artists and volunteers each morning. This year she added Barbara Schoenfeld and Karen Roeper to her veteran team of Lonna Richmond, Charlene Modena, Gail Falls, Deborah McDonald, and this year Deborah's mother, Evelyn McDonald visiting from Minnesota.

Lastly Steve Shaffer, without whom the beverage bar would not be the same, nor would it be as profitable. His team of Harvey Pearlman, Peter Lambert (whose donation to the beverage bar each year allows it to happen) and himself, have been doing it together for so long they barely have to speak to each other... although, it's never quiet at the bar.

Those four people allow me to spend the time to find new up and coming artists each year to round out our Muir Beach artists. Hopefully they will all be back next year.

This year we added the new position of greeter/counter... not such a fun job on a not such a pretty day. But Heidi Stubler & Adam Brown (with Paige & Callie), Sarah Nesbitt & Norbert Schnadt, Marilyn Laatsch, Gail Falls and David Piel all braved the elements.

Now, to start at the beginning... in order for the fair to take shape the infrastructure has to be set up. That's the hard, physical job of laying and taping down the rugs and covering the open spaces in the plastic "shades" on the deck, hanging the dividers between the booths, lugging all of the booth options from the back of the shed to the main room and putting up the tent that all happens on the Monday through Wednesday prior to the fair. This year Ken High, Debbie Dybsky, Cuco Alcala and his team had spectacular help in the person of Ellen Litwiller. Ellen, who is one of our fabulous Muir Beach artists also happens to be Gail Fall's daughter. Who knew she was so talented with a screw gun?

There's a day or two of the fair that most people don't think about. They are Thursday and Friday, when all of the artists are loading in their work and there is a team of volunteers to help them. Those people, Eric & Joey Groneman, Harvey Pearlman, Janice Kubota, Ken High, Kathy & John John Sward

*Continued on next page*



and Tayeko & Michael Kaufman and Ellen Litwiller were there all day and deserve not only kudos, but something to eat. Charlene Modena runs the Friday kitchen all by herself and keeps an entire crew of people happy. Harvey Pearlman was always a text away to solve problems and pick up last minute things when they got missed. This year we had help from the younger generation... both children and grandchildren... Steve Dybsky, Enzo Filippetto (Gail Falls' grandson), Drake & Paxton Miller (Gail & Ken High's grandkids) and TJ Pearlman. A special shout out belongs to TJ who was everywhere... doing anything that was needed with a smile on his face, a desire to take it all on and generally being the face of the younger generation helping everyone...an amazing job! Very, very early on Saturday morning all of the signs on Rte. 1 to direct the patrons to the fair were put in place. That meant driving over the hill and finding a way to get them hung... done every year by my husband, David and, of course, taking them down again on Sunday night.

Then there are those who gave a financial donation to help the cause... Beth & Durand Begault, Heidi & Adam Brown, Lotta Cole & Sandor Hatvany, Debbie Dybsky, Leighton Hills, Melissa & Larry Lasky, Kathleen Call & Levon Sagetalyan and Steve Shaffer. And both last year and this year, Ella Brundieck donated her profits from the Junior Artisans' table to the cause. By covering the expenses, they allow all of the profits from the beverage bar and the kitchen to go directly for community events.

Run by Ken High, the load out crew consisted of the young Muir Beach team as well as Rebecca Sharpless and Ellen Litwiller all of whom worked their buns off putting everything back in place.

Ken High and Ellen Litwiller merit a special "beyond the call of duty" thanks. Either Ken or Ellen, and often both, were there most of every day starting early Thursday morning working to put the fair together, helping the artists create their booths, aiding any artist who needed help through to the bitter end cramming the last containers into my car late on Sunday night. It is hard to express the extent of my gratitude to Ellen, Ken and his wife, Gail, who was there helping wherever she could. Their indefatigable cheery smiles, expertise and work ethic kept me going when I thought I had had enough.

As always, a special thank you to Kathy Sward who brings her years of expertise to the making of the fair. This year, without Suzanne, she was also a shoulder to lean on. She was there at the end of the day every day to help turn out the lights and make sure everything was buttoned up and accounted for.

THANK YOU ALL!!!! I hope I didn't miss anyone... my apologies if I did. I'm hoping this, now seasoned group, is back again next fair and I really hope to see some new faces because the bottom line is ... this is a very fun experience that benefits the entire community.

Happy 2020 everyone and I'll see you at the fair!

## Yes to Microchips for Pets

*By Bernard Halliwell*

On Martin Luther King Day a Keeshond was rescued from a shelter in Reno and transported to Bernard Halliwell for foster care. The rescue group named her Martina, loosely in honor of Martin Luther King. She had been found running loose with a Norwegian Elkhound and two Pit Bulls, and no one came to retrieve her from the shelter.

Martina was immediately warm and happy and friendly upon arrival. From the beginning it was obvious that she loved people, all people. She settled into life at 38 Seacape with the two other Keeshonden. On Saturday, Bernard and David went out for the day. On driving home through San Francisco, the rescue coordinator called to say that a fellow named Sean had found Martina on the Coastal Trail near Pirates Cove. He had had her checked for a microchip, and she received a call from him that he had Martina and that he lived in San Francisco. We happened to be driving through San Francisco, and we drove by and picked her up in the Marina District.

Martina somehow got out while we were out, and I sense that she went looking for people. Apparently she was very happy following people along the trail.

It is good to be aware that if you come across a dog that seems to be lost or stray, it may well have a microchip. The Marin Humane Society and veterinary offices have readers which can check for a microchip and read it, if there is one, to put you in contact with the owner.

# A Toast to Suzanne Miller

*Text and Photos by Laurie Piel*

Suzanne Miller was a long-time resident, an integral part of this community... and a good friend of mine. We lost her last October and the Community Center lost its hometown decorating muse. She never hid the cancer that made her life difficult but also always said that it was “never going to get this old biddy because I’m too tough for that”. It didn’t... and she left us unexpectedly while in Hawaii. When her husband, Michael told me of her passing I put together an impromptu gathering at the Peli with her favorite drink, champagne, to toast her.

She was known for many things in the community but none so impressive as the way she decorated our community center. She loved doing it. Anyone who attended the last five years of our Summer Solstice celebrations or the Holiday Arts Fair can attest to her inventiveness. The CSD has approved planting a tree in her name on the grounds of the community center which received so much of her loving attention. The Garden Club has graciously offered to choose an appropriate tree and location.

This is not an obituary but remembrances of her by the community. My own memories of Suzanne start just over 6 years ago when she and I partnered to take over the Holiday Arts Fair when The Quilters decided not to continue. An artist in her own right, she also took on the checkbook and correspondence and then decorated the Community Center... I was amazed! I had no idea that she had a past life as an award-winning package design and graphic artist who had decorated hotels, ballrooms and private events. She laughed and said... didn’t you know this is my forte? That laugh was always contagious. When you heard it, you couldn’t help knowing she was around and you just wanted to be part of whatever it was she was doing because that laugh was full of joy. Over the years we had quite a few champagne lunches at The Pelican Inn choosing artists and going over the finances. We always made each other laugh and that will always stay with me.

I asked some of the people who knew Suzanne to share a memory that made them smile. Some of them reflected on Suzanne’s immense creativity: Shirley Nygren shared that back in the ‘90’s when she was working in the Muir Woods cafe, Suzanne was working in the gift shop. Suzanne made herself a reputation for the beautiful and creative ways she was able to arrange the



*Toasting Suzanne at the Pelican Inn. Harvey Pearlman, Steve Shaffer, John John Sward, Gerry Pearlman, Marilyn Laatsch, David Halliwell, Amy Utstein, Laurie Piel, Steve Utstein, Bernard Halliwell, Lynda Silva, Robin Terra, Nina Vincent, Brenda Kohn, Kathy Sward, Beth Nelson.*



*Suzanne’s table at the Christmas fair with her decorations.*

merchandise. Kathy Sward tells this story, “At Christmas time, Suzanne would decorate her house to the nines. Apparently, some of the foundations of her stunning decorations were courtesy of the Muir Woods dumpster where she found some abandoned redwood tree bases. Suzanne used them for years turning them into gorgeous creations. One of my favorite memories is of her house always draped in lights at Christmas and how much I always loved seeing them on my way home”. Tayeko Kaufman recalls this episode, “One of my cherished



memories of Suzanne was working with her at the Garden Club's rummage sales. A natural stager, Suzanne would walk through and re-arrange items and organize our displays. Once she engaged a customer they never left without several items they probably did not need. During our last rummage sale, Suzanne sequestered 3 teenage girls who were simply looking for something to keep them warm. She ended up finding the most bizarre items when put together made the girls look like they had just come out of a high-end department store. Her laughter was contagious and her wit irreverent...one of a kind, she will be missed". Lonna Richmond highlighted another side of Suzanne... her strong beliefs in fair play and activism. "Suzanne was part of a delegation of women from Muir Beach at the first woman's march in January of 2017. We all had our signs and it was a hopeful time. Unfortunately, Suzanne lost her wallet with all her money and credit cards. I remember she was pretty bummed out about it, but I think it was within the following week that she heard from someone who had found her wallet. Everything was still in the wallet when it was returned to her. I know it helped restore our faith in humanity".



And then there are those who chose to share more personal experiences. Leslie Riehl grew up with Suzanne and offers this memory of their early days. "When we were young, my sister Florence, Suzanne and I all trained at the ballet school in Carmel. Although I was relegated to the piano after an unsuccessful year, Suzanne was blessed with the gift of movement. From the very beginning, her many years of training and natural gifts made her the envy of all the Carmel girls. She didn't just walk into a room, she entered a room. Those memories and our common childhood experience

in Carmel allowed us to laugh our way through many, many a bottle of champagne at the Pelican Inn". One of Suzanne's closest friends was Debra Hendsch and so I think it fitting to close with her thoughts... "I've known Suzanne since 1979 when I moved into a house on Sunset Way and discovered that her son Michael and my son Jay were both 18 months old. Although we've been friends throughout the years, what makes me smile the most is our friendship once we both became grandmothers. Suzanne was first with Michael's son Dylan's birth in 2010 followed by Delilah in 2015. Suzanne was over the moon with Dylan, her first grandchild. Michael and his wife were living in Suzanne's Honolulu home at the time. When I learned that I was going to also have a grandson by Jay in 2013 we formed the "TuTu Club"... TuTu being the Hawaiian word for grandmother. We met monthly at the Pub in the Peli and shared our joys (and challenges). It was almost like having your first child again. We both embraced being grandparents with the same great joy (and some might say fanaticism). Suzanne was fierce in her bond with her children, husband Mike and entire family. I moved "over the hill and we vowed to continue our monthly lunches. We met in Larkspur at Perry's mostly. She always told me I worked too hard and she was anxious for the day I retired so we could spend more time together. What makes her passing bittersweet for me is that this will be the year! It is such a blessing to have had the type of friendship that we shared. There were probably very few things we didn't know about each other's lives. Having that history is irreplaceable. I miss her and her infectious laughter every day." As will we all.



*Some late arrivals joining the toasts to Suzanne. Trish McCall, Nina Vincent, Debra Hendsch Steve Shaffer (seated); Marilyn Laatsch, Gary Friedman, Robin Terra (standing).*



# The Boys in the Truck . . . Early Days at the MBVFD – A Recollection

By David Brandt

The Muir Beach Volunteer Fire Department is a modern state of the art fire fighting machine with two trucks, sophisticated equipment such as self contained breathing apparatus, and a dedicated crew of volunteers led by Chief Chris Gove. Its competence was on full display at the recent 52 acre blaze just north of Slide Ranch where it fought the flames side by side with county units for 7 hours. With weekly training meetings and drills, 2 EMTs, one physician and 7 other dedicated members who volunteer their time, the MBVFD keeps us safe and our homeowner's insurance rates down. Each member carries a cell pager connected to the county emergency dispatch system in Woodacre so s/he can respond to structural and brush fires, medical emergencies, and car accidents before the Throckmorton Fire Station, located above the Mountain Home Inn, can get down the hill.

Newer residents of Muir Beach may be unaware that the MBVFD has a long and storied history, far more colorful than its nearly 50 years might suggest. Established in 1972, to meet the pressing need for an immediate response to house fires and the various calamities typical of a community slightly off the beaten track and slightly off the dominant paradigm. What follows is the story of the fire department's early years and how a somewhat ragtag band of well intentioned, somewhat undertrained, but enthusiastic men who did good but not always well. A word of caution to the reader. Memory is a living thing. What we remember and how we remember it, is always influenced by time and circumstance. Memory is not fact. It's our distorted recollection of fact. Or as Mark Twain remarked, "when I was younger I could remember anything whether it happened or not." That pretty much defines the history that unfolds below.

It all started circa 1971 when three house fires occurred within a short time on Sunset Way. Apparently, there was some sort of loosely formed group of Portuguese fellows who had a very old yellow truck commandeered from the county and outfitted with a hose or two. They had badges, but no radio communication or training. It became clear that something more formal had to be created. A meeting



Circa 1972

(or by some accounts a party) was held including John Sward, his brother Bill, Jerry and Harvey Pearlman, Julian Knox, Andre Pessis, Larry Yamamoto, Gordon Mosteller and Bill Hybert. It was determined that the community needed a functioning fire truck, firefighting equipment and ongoing training. The fire department would be self funding and operate independently of the CSD. John Sward raised his hand when they asked who wanted to run this fledgling operation without resources and he was elected unanimously. I mean no opposition whatsoever. It was clear from the outset John John was the only one

who had the energy, interest and charisma to build an institution that would be of service for the next 50 years and become the established program we have today.

You have to realize we were a group of long haired, mustachioed, freedom loving, drug friendly peaceniks. Today we most assuredly would be called hippies. But in those wild and heady times we were the elite, the enlightened and the evolved. Most of us even had respectable day jobs. We knew the community's safety depended on our endeavors and so the call went out for volunteers and the call was answered. Jim White signed up. So did Steve Bonicelli, Terry Onorato, Kathy Sward and Warren Myers. John John set about finding a more serviceable truck. He located a red Studebaker that the Tam Valley Fire Department was planning to retire and brought it out to the beach. He secured a place for it at the Dairy where Tink Pervier was running the stables. He set up training meetings in what is now the fire barn where the motley crew learned how to hook up and lay hoses, fight brush fires, use the radio, deal with structural fires and manage traffic accidents. How did John know these things. He had no formal education in fire skills or medical training. John confessed he would hang out at the firehouse in Tam Valley and observe how they handled their responsibilities; then he'd pass on this knowledge to the Muir Beach boys. He asked a lot of questions, went to all the county fire department meetings and eventually became known throughout Marin as the heart and soul of this legitimate and earnest group of locals.

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By the time I joined the MBVFD in 1977, the basic routines had been established. We met regularly I think on Thursday evenings. I remember we drilled once every two weeks. Attendance was a little spotty and the membership of the department fluctuated sometimes from week to week but there were always firemen to respond when the next emergency arose. I was given an old firefighters jacket and a yellow helmet with a visor. I don't remember any gloves. There were boots at the fire barn on a first come first served basis. Most of this equipment was second hand surplus from Hamilton Field in northern Marin which was closing and quite willing to part with its old gear. John John drove up and hauled it back, and it became the firefighting kit we used for many years thereafter. Yes, it was ill fitting, malodorous and very used, but, hey, we had limited resources and it provided crucial protection from heat and sparks. When we all showed up for an emergency wearing our gear we looked like an hirsute group of transients running away from a barber's convention.



*Trying out the new hose after the fire truck had arrived.*

How did we get to the fires and accidents quickly? Several of us carried a radio or in my case a larger device called a Plectron that I placed under my bed. The thing squawked continuously announcing every road accident, ambulance call, and police action in the county. It drove my wife Laurie crazy. Finally, I complained to John John about it. "That radio is ruining my life," I grumbled. "Hey turn it to channel 8. That's the dedicated local channel," he told me. Who knew? That moment was descriptive of how things went in those days. We learned a lot on the fly, trial and error was a good teacher. Somehow it worked.

At some point, someone found for us, possibly Supervisor Steve Kinsey, a full size, modern chartreuse fire truck,

specially built for us and well equipped with large tank capacity and multiple hoses of varying size for any kind of conflagration. It had a cool siren, aluminum ladders and a serious light display on the roof. The only hitch was it had to be picked up in Florida. Immediately John, John and Bill Hybert flew out to Miami to bring it home. Legend has it they drove straight back from Florida, with only a brief stop in Texas, alternating shifts while the other slept. When they got back to the Beach in record time, exhausted and exhilarated, the Independent Journal and 30 locals were awaiting their arrival. We gathered at the mailboxes and cheered at this marvelous, oddly colored vehicle. But the reporters weren't quite ready. So John and Bill drove back up to three corners and back again to the cheering crowds for the benefit of the TV cameras. Authentic history made a bit inauthentically.

John John determined that the fire department needed a logo to identify itself and perhaps to even define it for the rest of the county and beyond. He happened to be building a stone fireplace at Bryce Browning's house on Cove Lane. He knew Bryce was a talented graphic artist and asked him to create an insignia we could put on our clothing and maybe even our truck. Well anyone who knows Bryce Browning knows he is a creative genius with a very off beat sense of humor. What he created was an iconic logo for the ages. That dog with its leg perfectly raised captured the spirit of those early years in the MBVFD. The insouciance, the confidence, the unconventionality, the freedom – that was Muir Beach in those days as well. And that icon has traveled around the world and can be found on clothing as far as Australia and China.

In those years we didn't have many structural fires. There were a number of brush fires though, medical emergencies and lots of motorcycle accidents. Invariably on Sunday, a group of enthusiasts would gather at Karim's Arco station in Tam Junction and head up the coast around 8am. They still do this. You can hear the sound of bumble bees in the distance as they come down the hill into our valley. A number of bikers would leave early to beat the rush and these were the guys who would invariably skid out on the dew covered curves of Route One around 6 in the morning. We would get the early call, grab our pants from the fire barn and race toward the accident. We'd often find the bike on the side of the road and the rider in the chaparral with multiple scrapes and sometimes a few broken bones. No one was ever seriously hurt to my recollection. That thick brush at the

*Continued on next page*

## The Boys in the Truck

*Continued from previous page*

edge of the asphalt can serve as a life saver for errant drivers.

Once we got a call about a car over the side of the road above the Zen Center. When we got to the site we found a Bentley automobile of all things far down the ravine surrounded by poison oak. Not an attractive proposition for an underdressed rescue squad. But Larry Yamamoto apparently did not react to the cruel toxins of the oak plant, so we sent him down to the car thinking the worst. Turns out no one was in it. And no papers were to be found in the vehicle either. Later we heard that the car had belonged to the Beatles and had been abandoned in that gulch by their agent. We had no reason to disbelieve that.

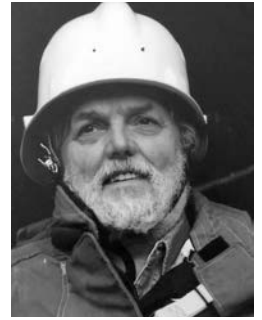
Were we always efficient and first to the scene? John John claims we were a crack bunch of dedicated pros. But there are a few stories that may belie his estimate of our abilities. Andre Pessis remembers when he was the only firefighter home at the beach when a conflagration broke out at the Rohan's home on Sunset. In his haste to put water on the flames, he was a little hazy on the details of how to hook up the hose to the fire engine pump. The input and output valves can look a lot alike and he confused the two. When he turned on the pump, the steel drum in the tank exploded and the noise could be heard on Panoramic. I remember this very same incident but I swear it was at Leba Wine's house on Ahab. In my recollection we put the fire out with a garden hose after the pump was wrecked. Had we blown the drum a second time?

Then there was the time Jim White was operating the main radio and was conversing with emergency dispatch in Woodacre. He wasn't especially familiar with how that device worked. John John mostly used the radio. Legend has it that Jim inadvertently held down the "talk" button for a good 10 minutes in the process cutting off all incoming emergency communication within the county.

Once I was driving up the hill to a road accident in the big chartreuse truck which was filled with water and quite heavy. The thing about that truck was that it was hard to shift it from 2nd to 3rd on a hill and I stalled it out and couldn't get the thing to shift into first. Harvey Pearlman was on the radio sitting next to me that day when he heard a call from county dispatch sending units to a stalled fire truck on Route One. That was our truck. I swore him to secrecy and this is the first time that



*The author and Harvey Pearlman on the day the new truck arrived.*



*Founding Fire Chief John Sward*

misadventure has been reported.

Back in those days there was a residence opposite the butterfly grove on the opposite side of Pacific Way. It was right on the creek and often flooded during the winter. A number of the crew lived there including Andre who had named it Circus after his band. At some point it became too mildewed to live in and the fire department got permission to burn it down as a practice exercise in fighting structural fires. We all arrived in full kit with our one breathing device and took turns crawling on our knees through the burning wreckage. That place was lung scorching hot and the skin on your extremities felt pruned and cactus dry. You couldn't see much and it was easy to panic. It became clear to all of us in a mere instant that what we were blithely doing was, in fact, enormously dangerous and unpredictable. And that lesson stayed with us even as we laughed at the challenges we faced every day.

What motivates someone to volunteer their time to an organization like a fire department? To put in the training time each week. To jump out of bed early on Sunday morning or in the middle of the night. To always be on call when you're off the clock at home. In the case of the MBVFD, all of us were providing a community service that was important and necessary. We liked hanging out with each other and we liked feeling that we were useful and could perhaps save lives and make a real difference. But at the root, maybe there was something else beyond altruism and good will. After all we were boys living the childhood dream with a fire chief named John, John. What boy doesn't wanted to be a fireman, drive a fire truck, play with the two way radio, rush into burning buildings to rescue others and be a hero. It was never like that of course. But does that matter? In the recesses of the mind, dreams live on.

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# Llamas on Muir Beach?

By Brenda Kohn

Maybe you have seen a couple of unusual animals walking on the beach in the early mornings or late afternoons. They would be Chubby (a female) and Cheryl (a male), the llamas belonging to John Koene, a long time resident of Pacific Way. John believes these two llamas are around ten years old. They are the second pair he has owned since he started raising sheep in Bolinas several years ago and discovered that certain llamas are good guardians of sheep. They are also more effective than dogs at keeping coyotes at bay. Special llamas, such as Chubby and Cheryl, will bond with sheep, especially the young ones. They also can browse the same feed as sheep, and won't wander away.

Like alpacas, llamas are domestic animals. They are not known to exist in the wild. Chubby and Cheryl mostly reside in Bolinas, though Chubby spends some time in John's backyard in Muir Beach. Other than grass hay, John's llamas are fed an oat/molasses supplement. He transports them back and forth in an open trailer attached to his truck, which is a common sight in Lower Muir Beach. For exercise, they get to walk on either Big or Little Beach, usually early or late in the day when there are not a lot of people and dogs around. They are mostly on leash, and they do like to walk or lie down in the water.

John loves to hike in the Sierras, so he is also training the llamas to be used in back packing. Their trips to the beach and walking on the surrounding trails are good exercise. John has already taken Cheryl into wilderness areas, and hopes to be able to organize back packing trips



on the John Muir Trail. One of his two prior llamas wasn't working out for this, so he traded her in for Chubby who seems to be doing a good job.

When asked how the llamas respond to being around dogs on the beach,

John said that dogs need to be respectful of the llamas and not be aggressive, which his dogs have learned. Llamas will spit if they are annoyed. Nonetheless, he tries to time his forays to the beach when there are few people and dogs, which is why, if you happen to be at one of the beaches in the early morning or at sunset, don't be surprised to encounter one or two llamas enjoying themselves as well.

John said he is happy to introduce Chubby and Cheryl to local kids and visitors, but cautioned that folks should not feed the llamas since outside food, such as some plants, oleander for example, can be toxic to them.

The picture here was taken on a recent early foggy morning on Big Beach, with John and Chubby posing on their way to a long trail walk.

## Muir Beach Firemen's BBQ

The **48th Annual Muir Beach Volunteer Firemen's Barbecue** is coming up on **Sunday, May 24th** and preparations are underway. The always festive and productive **BBQ Planning Kickoff Dinner** will take place **Sunday, March 1st** at the MBCC. Enjoy a potluck dinner featuring Chief Gove's delicious tri-tip at 5 pm, followed by a BBQ planning meeting at 6 pm. Come join your neighbors and find out how you can help out at this year's BBQ - the biggest fundraiser of the year for the MBVFD. —David Taylor

## Can you guess who this is?



Gerry Pearlman



Terry Onorato



Martha de Barros

# THE FIRE DIARIES

By Beth Nelson

OCTOBER 8, 2019

We've been all day receiving emergency alerts that the power is to be cut at midnight. A preventable fire measure. I just discovered it would be some days until power is restored. We've been told to prepare for evacuation. Do I pack Edward, Tenn's childhood



Teddy? Our Passport, my contacts... what exactly does one perceive as valuable? Right now the moon out front is working its way to being full, the ocean's rhythmic sound beats clear, but I realize nothing is for certain. On the long ride home tonight in all this beauty I pause and think of impermanence, ones constant companion.

OCTOBER 9

My emergency supplies are woefully lacking. Beautiful beeswax candles and votive do not a life make without power for 5-7 days. (note to self). Everyone is rather upset. Over a million people without power for at least the next week. I think of these "upsetments" as karma. Global warming is alive and well. Today we've been told to conserve water. Our wells require electricity to pump water into the holding tanks. How much we take for granted. I swam in the cold Pacific, then forgot I have no hot water without electricity - so no warming



shower. Tomorrow we leave for Santa Barbara, a trip planned weeks ago. Fires are an economic phenomenon. Those who suffer and those who don't. Utterly economic and political. Sigh. Almost full moon. We can see the stars tonight. Without electricity the stars shine brighter and more beautiful.

OCTOBER 24

From my work in Bolinas I can see the Muir Fire burning. Thank you first responders. The planes are flying overhead, dropping the red fire retardant. Helicopters rat-tat-tat over the lagoon, dipping down to scoop up water. All afternoon we hear them coming and going. I run over to the neighbors in Bolinas to watch on the t.v. our beloved coastline burning. Praying for containment.

We've named them the smoke sunsets. A surreal and sad consequence of our new world order. I walk down to watch my boy surf the surreal sunset right into darkness.



OCTOBER 25

The smoke plume from the Kincade fire arrived at the end of the day... snaking into the city to settle over it like that Carl Sandberg poem. My son was playing music as I unloaded the car... more oil lamps, a solar radio, ice packs, food that doesn't



spoil. Tonight I don't resent any of it. I'm over that. The world needs to wake up. This is the new world. The planet is calling us into action. Enjoying every ounce of electricity before another 3 day black out.

OCTOBER 27

After 2 days we have no hot water to shower, my propane camping stove tanks are finished, and everything in the fridge is spoiled. We have moved to Joan's in the city. The destruction from the Kincade fire is hard to grasp. The containment has dropped from 10% to 5 %. Our hearts drop too. The fire has gained 3,000 acres today. 85 square miles have

*Continued on next page*



burnt. Another wind is brewing. We feel lucky to be sleeping on the floor in a beautiful Victorian in San Francisco. We flip a switch, and lights go on. Bodega Bay is evacuated. Muir Beach is one tiny road in and one tiny road out. Now we are out.

## OCTOBER 28

In the city we regain our humor. Tenn continues to wear his "Send Help" t-shirt. At lunch he says "So mom, maybe the Getty fire will unite with the Kincade Fire and all of California will burn up. He thinks I am hysterical for evacuating, but I have been in danger before and this is my reaction. Get out. Tenn surfs Ocean Beach. Joan goes to the dentist, and I buy comfort food. Always my reaction – let's cook. At Whole Foods in the Haight the queue for check out is 250 people long. People from Marin are crossing the bridge as the black out means no ATM no food, no traffic lights, no cell service, no gas.

I receive an email from Michael Lerner at Common Wheel beautifully written with measure and compassion, reminding us "We are building our new resilience capacity with every passing week. This is the new normal in California. It will not go away." He reminds us that gas is now only available an hour away from Bolinas. Without electricity there are no gas stations, no ATM's, few markets. The lessons in humility and compassion are huge.



Tenn snuggles with Harry the dog, I wash the dishes grateful for hot water, Joan is happy for the company, and we are happy for Joan. San Francisco, tonight.

## OCTOBER 29

At breakfast we take turns reading the new fire updates to Joan. The irony is not lost on us. The 83 year old woman with 4,000 books lost her capacity to read last year due to a mini stroke. Half a million people are without electricity. I make meatless stew and over dinner that night we talk more fire talk. Tenn turns to a book beside the table I had always admired.

"Mozart's letters to his Family." We take turns reading his 1700's correspondence out loud. Tenn reads it in Italian, then translates for us. We marvel at Mozart's youth and brilliance, then Joan suggests we play some Mozart sonatas. He was 18 at the time. We all sit back and close our eyes and listen. The fires and our worries do not exist for a few lovely moments.



The candles sputter, and we all go to bed peacefully. In the dark I write this a little teary. This is a love letter to simple pleasures. Always there, always waiting. San Francisco tonight.

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Over the course of the next 3 months 11 blackouts took place and with them my attitude took a radical turn. There is no room for complaining, only room for preparing. This is the new world order.

My desire to be off the grid has grown each day. I am investing in a solar generator. (Goalzero.com), I am switching out my electric stove for a propane stove. I keep my gas tank full now. Oil lanterns hang from the redwood beams in the house, full of scentless lamp oil. (I know how to change their wicks.) My solar radio is my new best friend. My documents are converted to a thumb drive. I've bought a Berkey Water filtration system that I adore. There are containers full of frozen water filling my freezer. I hope to be able to buy a solar fridge soon. I have plenty of beans and tuna and tinned goods in the pantry. I now know that fire alerts sent to my cell don't work in this cove, it is a dead zone, and so I cannot rely on information. I have a long board on the side of the house and a wetsuit handy, if I would ever need to paddle out. People laughed when I told them this, but look at the images of Australia. Over 600 people on little boats with breathing masks, floating in the ocean while their village burned. I keep a full box of masks now and share them freely. And I continue to document this part of my own little history, something I never imagined for my child, something profound we are all taking part in, whether we like it or not. This is my little diary of climate change.



# Muir Beach Fire Update

By David Taylor

The fire department completed an eventful year. We experienced a new level of wildfire threat to our community and were fortunate to be spared from a much worse fate. The fires currently raging in Australia are a daily reminder of the risks we all face living in this idyllic spot.

While we reflect on our brush with wildfire disaster we have already experienced a few intense winter storms and the season is still underway. This time of year in the fire department involves responding to fallen trees, downed power lines, flooding and highway accidents.

You may experience power outages and need to use a generator and please be safe and careful with these powerful and flammable machines.

Flooding is an annual reality for many in our community. Twenty homes are impacted by seasonal flooding that blocks Pacific Way, Lagoon Drive and Greene Lane and inundates cars and dwellings when there are very high flows. Please be careful driving into flooded areas and be aware that even our largest rig may not be able to safely access Pacific Way in an emergency.

On Christmas Eve there was a tragedy in Muir Woods in which a young man lost his life in a freak accident that was reported worldwide. We participated in the response alongside other local fire agencies, Park Police and the Medical Examiner. This was a very sad and somber end to our year as first responders.

In 2019 we had 62 calls of which 35% were in our community or at the beach, 25% were in the Muir Woods National Monument and 40% were on the roads and highways. We are proud to serve our community but

also to represent Muir Beach to the wider public as a community that cares about its neighbors and visitors.

Running even a small fire department such as ours requires a lot of time and money to maintain readiness, training and modern safe equipment. We ran 34 drills this past year each of which is several hours in duration. To put this in perspective we spent almost as much time training as we did responding to emergencies. Curtis Christian lead the department in drill attendance as he participated in 91% of scheduled training exercises.

Aside from formal training members of our department spend many hours every month engaged in vehicle and equipment maintenance.

We are fortunate to have the financial support of our community and we rounded out the year with two annual fundraising events in November and December: The Annual Appreciation Dinner and the Holiday Arts Fair merchandise booth. These activities together raised over \$8000. The Appreciation Dinner, created and catered by the Corbit family this year featured quail! The dinner did well in particular because of generous donations so that all of the firefighters and their significant others were well fed for free and all costs were covered.

This week we were fitted for new personal protective equipment that is paid for by our Cal Fire grant and the MB Volunteer Fire Association. We couldn't be more grateful. Muir Beach Fire was featured in a great article in this month's issue of *The North Bay Business Journal*: "The Heroes Next Door" northbaybiz.com in which Chief Gove and other local chiefs were interviewed.

This is a great time of year to think about managing defensible space. The community would benefit

from full participation in FireSafe Marin ([www.firesafemarin.org](http://www.firesafemarin.org)), so that we could develop a vegetation management plan that is coordinated community wide. If you are interested in a leadership role in this county program please let us know.

## Recommendations for safe operation of your personal generator.

### FUEL

- Gasoline is highly flammable, be extremely careful in its use and transport.
- At the gas station, set gas can on the ground before you fill it. This reduces the risk of static electricity generated by the gas pump that could cause a fire.
- Use approved gasoline containers.
- Consider purchasing a pre mixed can of ethanol free 4 cycle fuel. These will last open for 2 years, 5 years if sealed.

### EQUIPMENT

- Allow the generator to cool for at least 30 minutes before refueling, to reduce the risk of accidental fire or burns.
- Make sure that your generator is in good condition and run every few months when not in regular use.
- Never use any generator indoors or adjacent to an open window or door. The risk of carbon monoxide poisoning is very high.
- Use properly sized extension cords.
- Most portable generators can be easily overloaded if too many devices are connected.
- Appliances that require 220V (a dryer, an oven or hot water heater) input cannot be managed by most portable generators.
- Only a licensed electrician is qualified to connect a generator to the main electrical panel at your house.
- Never leave the generator running overnight or unattended.
- At the end of the season drain the gas tank on the generator and allow to run dry until it quits to remove fuel from the carburetor.

### OR STAY OFF THE GRID

- If you do use candles for lighting, make sure to extinguish them when you retire for the evening.

# Maury Ostroff, Weekend Woodworker

By Beth Begault

Do some of you out there have vague hopes of learning a new skill someday—that elusive, satisfying hobby—but you just haven’t gotten around to it? Let long time Muir Beacher Maury Ostroff be your inspiration. As a data base programmer of many years who was looking for a creative outlet from the corporate world some 15 or 20 years ago, he enrolled in a woodworking night class at Tam High, and there in one of those old school wood shops he found a hobby that he loves. He was drawn to the perfectionism of the craft (a 1/8" gap means starting over?!) and to the opportunity to transform raw materials into something that lasts, but while he was at it, to make his own mistakes and to have the autonomy to change his designs at will. Flash forward to the year 2020 and look around the Community Center: you’ll see two glorious tables painstakingly made by hand and donated by Maury (more on those later. If you’re skimming, don’t miss the last two paragraphs).

Woodworking is an ancient skill that goes all the way back to the Neanderthals, believe it or not. The evolution of woodworking with its tools (first flint, then copper and bronze in the earliest days) is closely tied to the development of civilization (let’s pause and imagine a world without furniture), but a modern day workshop for a serious hobbyist needs some serious tools.

A table saw is the center of the shop for cutting length and width, and milling tools (a jointer and a planer) are used to get boards flat



*Maury Ostroff*

and square so they can be cut on the table saw (this explains why that 2x4 you bought is really only 1.5x3.5, because it started as a 2x4 rough cut). The detail and precision of truly beautiful pieces is created with more tools: a miter saw for angles, routers with their endless bits, hollow chisels for cutting out square or rectangular mortises, a band saw for curves and shapes, and hand tools like chisels, planes, and lots and lots of sandpaper.

While it seems counterintuitive, a lot of the best woodworking is done by semi-amateurs. Consider that professionals need to make a profit and are bound by deadlines and the wishes of their clients, while serious hobbyists might take a year of evenings and weekends—or more—to build something, to embellish and perfect it, to showcase the beauty of the grain. Speaking of grain, the technique of bookmatching is used to create the mirror image grains that you’ll see in some of the best pieces (slice wood across the depth of the piece and open it up so that two adjoining surfaces have the same appearance, but mirrored). Creating flow of grain causes waste, but 90%

of the art is showcasing the wood, ie by accentuating the patterns in the center and contracting them in the trim pieces.

Choosing the wood is where it all begins, of course. Most hardwoods are sold at lumber specialty yards. Maury often uses cherry and vertical grain Douglas fir (to match the interior trim of his house), but his favorite is quarter-sawn white oak (Mission style). Right now he’s in the early stages of making an armoire from claro walnut, a northern California variety characterized by a rich brown color and striking grain patterns. Everything from a complex cabinet to a simple cutting board requires a combination of dimensional engineering and an artistic statement to create something that’s both functional and beautiful. The complexity of woodworking lies in the fundamental concept that wood moves: it cups, bows, and absorbs moisture, and that must be understood and factored into the design.

It’s probably fair to say that a passionate woodworker is never done with learning and perfecting, and 10,000 hours of practice will get you part way there. If you have an interest, the library has some great books, and Maury’s personal library includes *The Complete Illustrated Guide to Joinery* by Gary Rowgowski. Maury pointed out that there are YouTube videos for absolutely everything and other online resources, and those provide another way to learn about woodworking from the comfort of your own armchair.

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## Weekend Woodworker

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It turns out that in this community of wood lovers, there are other woodworkers among us, including Steve Shaffer. Maury and Janice have some extraordinary birdhouses by Steve on display, and Steve makes his uniquely beautiful birdhouses for the Muir Beach Garden Club to sell at the Holiday Crafts Fair. Maury and Steve have collaborated on multiple projects, including the most recently donated table in the community center. Another local legend: Dave Elliott did a lot of masterful work here until he—sadly for Muir Beach—moved north a few years ago.

Back to the two donated pieces at the community center: The round drop leaf table that's a much loved/much used fixture of the downstairs main room was built from African

mahogany and donated by Maury five years ago. The dramatic trestle table in the upstairs room, currently the gathering spot for the monthly men's group, was built last fall from Muir Beach's old redwood water tank, making it a labor of love that is a most wonderful combination of local history and the blood, sweat, tears, and collaboration of Maury

and Steve (but yes, they still have all their fingers). When you have a moment, take a look at the details from above and below, including the precision of the workmanship, the beautiful grain of the wood, its assembly with pegs, the mortises and tenons, and the only-in-Muir-Beach dedication plaque on the underside. Thank you, Maury and Steve.

*Photos by Beth Begault*



*Work-in-progress on the trestle table. Maury and Steve share the labor and design decisions.*