

the Country Almanac

For Menlo Park



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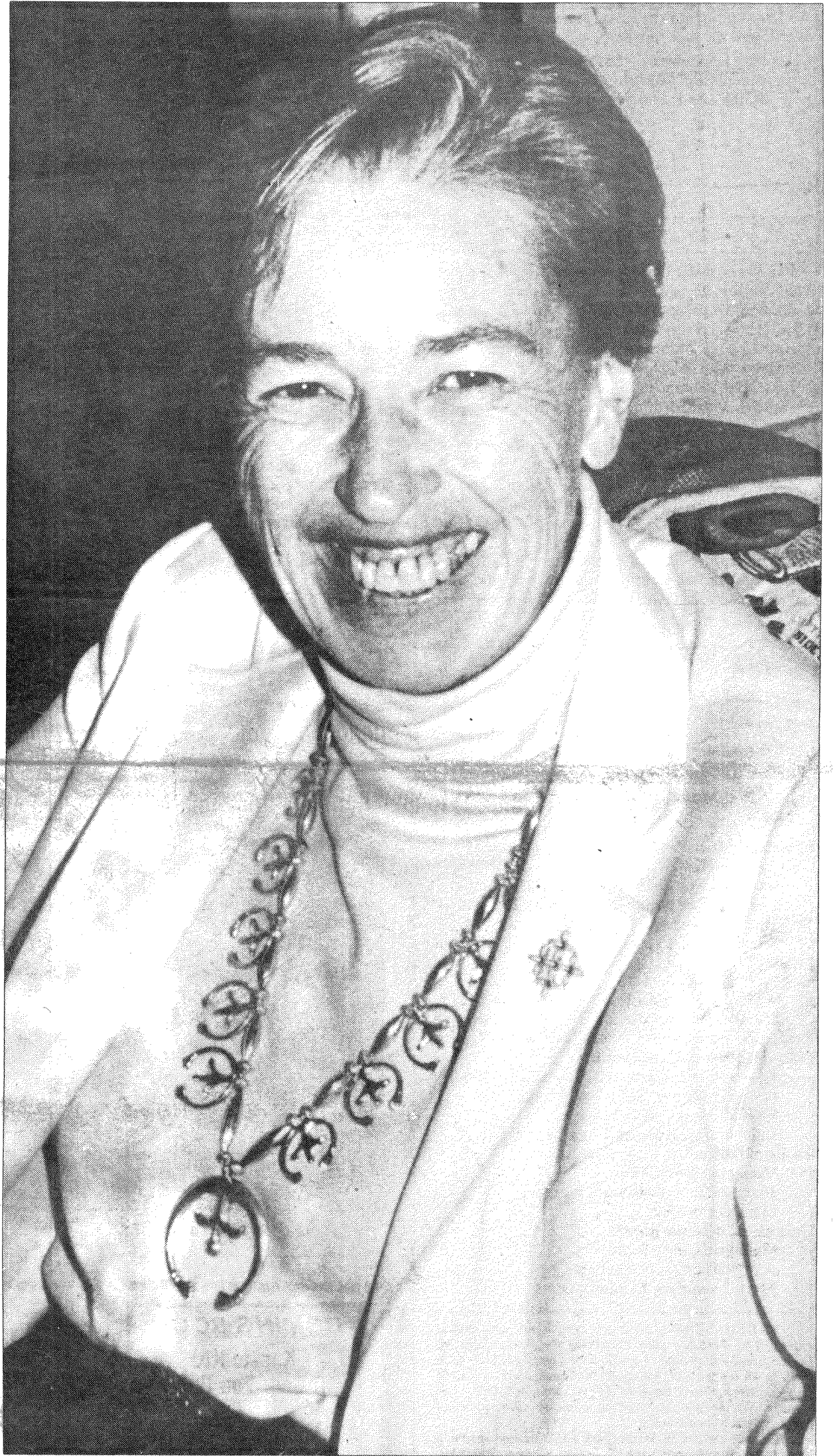
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Founding mother recalls early days of environmental movement



Story on Pages 8 and 9

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST CLAIRE DEDRICK founded the Peninsula Conservation Center in Menlo Park in 1970. While it celebrates its 15th birthday Sunday, she has moved on to Sacramento where she serves as executive officer of the State Lands Commission.

New business faces

7

Japanese voice for peace

13

Garden clubs convene here

27

Peninsula Conservation Center

BY MARION SOFTKY

A history of the Peninsula Conservation Center is a history of the Peninsula environmental movement the past 15 years.

The face of the Peninsula is different because of campaigns coordinated from the center since it opened 15 years ago in Menlo Park in the heyday of the environmental movement.

Many people still remember the bumper stickers

which raised the community conscience about some of the Peninsula's most cherished assets—and the threats to them: Save Our Bay, Save Our Coasts, Damn Deadly Toxics (DDT), Save San Bruno Mountain, Ban the Span (the almost forgotten "southern crossing" of the Bay from Brisbane to Alameda Island).

Now as new environmental problems surface and the old ones persist, the center plans to reach out more aggressively into the community and to become more of an advocate in environmental issues.

Less spectacular but very far reaching have been the

services the center, and the organizations it serves, have provided the public. These include educational programs, an environmental library, tours and hikes, a place to call with questions, an entry where people can get involved with environmental issues.

The Environmental Information Desk (328-5313) handles 7,000 calls a year, says Executive Director Jacquelyn Brown. A mother wants to know what to do when the spray truck comes down the street; people want to know where to go camping; some call about toxic chemicals in the water; others ask about stories they read in the paper.

Ms. Brown, who joined the center staff in January, will be introduced officially at the center's 15th birthday party Sunday, May 5, at the historic Picchetti Winery in the Monte Bello Open Space Preserve.

The Picchetti Winery itself is a testament to one of the campaigns coordinated with the help of the conservation center. It is located in one of 18,000 acres of permanent public open space acquired and being developed by the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District. This was established in 1972 by voters in Santa Clara County to help prevent urban sprawl from taking over the foothills, mountains and bayfront and to preserve these lands for the benefit and use of all.

HOW IT STARTED

The roots of the Peninsula Conservation Center are right here in South San Mateo County.

Here in 1966 Claire and Kent Dedrick became involved in the fight to keep the Alameda de las Pulgas from becoming an expressway and to have the electric lines underground.

Here Pete McCloskey, and Woodside, beat the Atomic Energy Commission over power lines to the Stanford Linear Accelerator and in 1967 he won a seat to Congress over a field of 14 candidates.

Here Janet Adams of Woodside and the Dedricks flooded the area with 70,000 blue and green, "Save Our Bay" bumper stickers from a little office on the second floor of the building which is now the British Bankers Club. On top of intensive lobbying these helped persuade the state Legislature and then Governor Reagan to establish a permanent agency (Bay Conservation and Development Commission) to control development in and along San Francisco Bay.

As the momentum from these campaigns built up, Mrs. Dedrick and Mrs. Adams, who now lives in the Virgin Islands, formed a partnership—Conservation

helped shape Peninsula growth

Coordinators. In 1970 Mrs. Dedrick launched the Peninsula Conservation Center and remained as its director until 1974 when she went to Sacramento as Secretary of Resources for Governor Jerry Brown.

"I realized that the citizen who wants to do something about the environment suffers an enormous runaround before he learns who the decision-makers are," she said in an interview at the time. Its goals were to provide a place where citizens could get information about environmental problems, a place to disseminate public information on environmental questions, a place which could provide basic equipment and services to environmental organizations, and a place where these organizations could exchange information and coordinate campaigns.

The center's first home was the little house with the lawn and flowerbeds on Oak Grove Avenue in Menlo Park—then painted in "Save Our Bay" blue and green.

After two years in Menlo Park, "We were coming off the walls," Mrs. Dedrick recalled recently. So they moved to the handsome building at the corner of Embarcadero and Emerson Street in Palo Alto. "That seemed absolutely gigantic—for the first six months," she commented. Many conservationists still remember the cranky mimeograph machine in the moldy basement, many hours of stamp licking for mailings, and the annual spring sales of native plants.

Now the center is crammed into the old Palo Alto firehouse at 2253 Park Blvd. where it serves as

headquarters for six organizations, and supports others. In front a demonstration garden shows how water conserving plants can still be pretty. Inside the attractive gift shop helps with the constant problem of raising money.

Organizations currently based at the center are the Loma Prieta Chapter of the Sierra Club, the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, Camp Unalayee, the Committee for Green Foothills, the Environmental Volunteers and Nature Explorations. It also helps service several other organizations, including the Whole Access Project to provide access for the handicapped in local parks.

NEW DIRECTIONS

"I feel we should be an environmental conscience for the community," sums up Ernest Goitein of Atherton, the present chairman of the center board. "We want to get as many people as possible informed on the sensitivity and vulnerability of the environment."

The center is now taking its popular brown bag lunches with environmental programs into local businesses once a month. It also has programs for community groups.

It may start taking a more active role in promoting its positions.

Conservationists see many of their hard fought gains being eroded—sometimes swept—away. The tax

revolution, the move to deregulate and decontrol, changes in city councils and boards of supervisors, the price of land, and a governor who wants to get rid of coastal protection, combine to threaten the environmental protections won in the early 70s.

New issues of the eighties include toxics and contamination. But the old issues of the 70s remain. The proposed freeway-size Devil's Slide by-pass could undo the Coastal Plan and open the coast to development. A new board of supervisors and a combination of specific complaints threaten the open space district in San Mateo County.

"There's still San Francisco Bay—that's still one of the biggies," says Mr. Goitein. He notes a lot of illegal filling continues. With each developable acre worth up to \$500,000 there is "an impetus to try and develop it even if it is against the law," he says.

Mrs. Dedrick, who is executive officer of the State Lands Commission, has responsibility for almost five million acres of state-owned land and water including San Francisco Bay and the first three miles of ocean off the coast, is proud of the center and the work it does.

Doing homework, understanding the issues, coming up with workable solutions, "that kind of work has a positive effect on government decisions. It makes all the difference," she says. "And, as always, it's hundreds of people who make it work."