

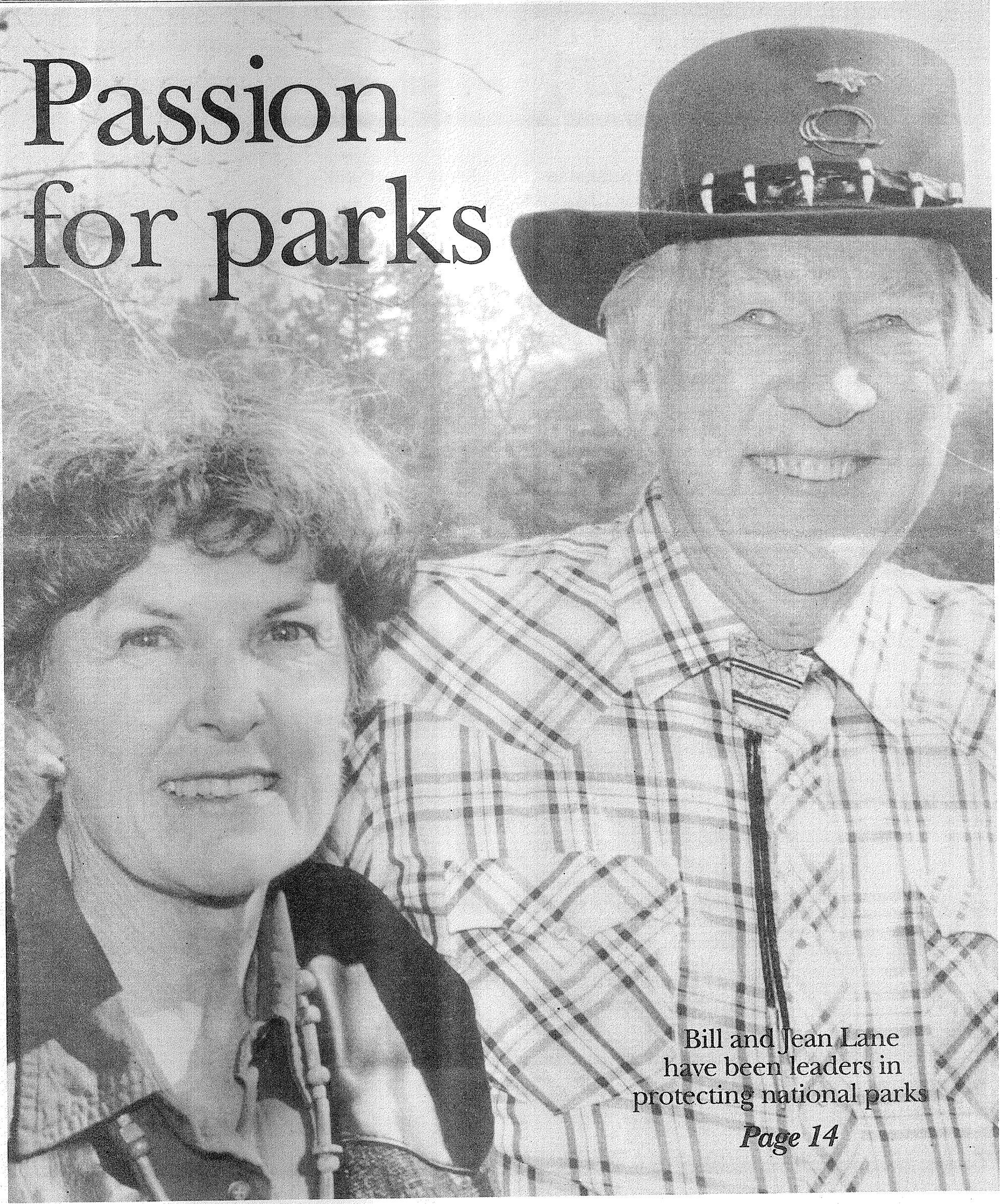
# Menlo Park's Almanac

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## Passion for parks



Bill and Jean Lane  
have been leaders in  
protecting national parks

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# Bill Lane: lifelong devotion to parks

C O V E R  
S T O R Y

■ *From Portola Valley to Australia and in the pages of Sunset, Bill Lane made his mark on parks and environment*

By MARION SOFTKY

*Hello, Glacier . . .  
... Hello Curry  
Let the fire fall . . .  
... OK*

**T**he call for the once-famous firefall — a cascade of flame as workers pushed a bonfire from Glacier Point to fall to Yosemite Valley 2,000 feet below — shivered the rafters of the elegant ballroom of the Four Seasons Hotel in Washington, D.C., as Bill Lane of Portola Valley roared the familiar words to almost 300 dignitaries assembled to honor him as Conservationist of the Year.

Ambassador L.W. "Bill" Lane Jr., who is better known locally as a founding father of Portola Valley, ambassador to Australia under President Reagan, and longtime publisher of *Sunset Magazine*, was in Washington March 1 to be feted by the National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA), which gave him the William Penn Mott Jr. Conservationist of the Year Award for a lifetime of promoting national parks.

"Bill has been one of our nation's most outspoken and persistent advocates for our great national parks. We're real proud of you," said California Gov. Pete Wilson in a video titled "A Passion for Parks" that was shown at the party.

Never a boat rocker, Mr. Lane has diligently promoted parks through established channels and across party lines. He has served on commissions and boards that promoted parks under every president since Lyndon Johnson.

He was credited with helping establish Redwood Park in Northern California, the Alaska national parks, the new desert national park in Southern California, and most recently the addition of the Presidio to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. He served on the board of Colonial Williamsburg and helped draft the "Vail Agenda" to guide national parks into the 21st century.

Paul Pritchard, president of the National Park and Conservation Association, summed up his contributions, saying, "Bill is always able to bring people together and make things happen."

## Parks threatened

The party itself was a real *Sunset* production. Washingtonians were treated to a menu out of *Sunset*, from the tangerine and radicchio salad (1994) through the grilled salmon with California wild rice and porcini mushrooms (1993), to the creme brulee with Anglaise sauce (1963). Wines

were from California and Australia, and guests took home a topographic map in chocolate of Yellowstone National Park — the nation's and the world's first national park — founded 123 years ago.

"It was like a love-in — informal and fun," Mr. Lane's dynamic wife, Jean, said afterwards. The Lanes will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary next month.

Beyond the fun, however, there was urgency and a widespread fear that national parks are threatened by Congress' onslaught on federal spending.

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt urged park supporters to be heard in the upcoming battle to fund national parks. "We must mobilize in support of national parks, which are in grave danger," Secretary Babbitt said, adding, "On my watch I am not going to be a part of closing any national park."

For his part, Mr. Lane spent most of his Washington visit lobbying a dozen senators and congressmen on the value of national parks. "National parks are our national museum of all the great values that are so important," he said. "I find tremendous support for parks."

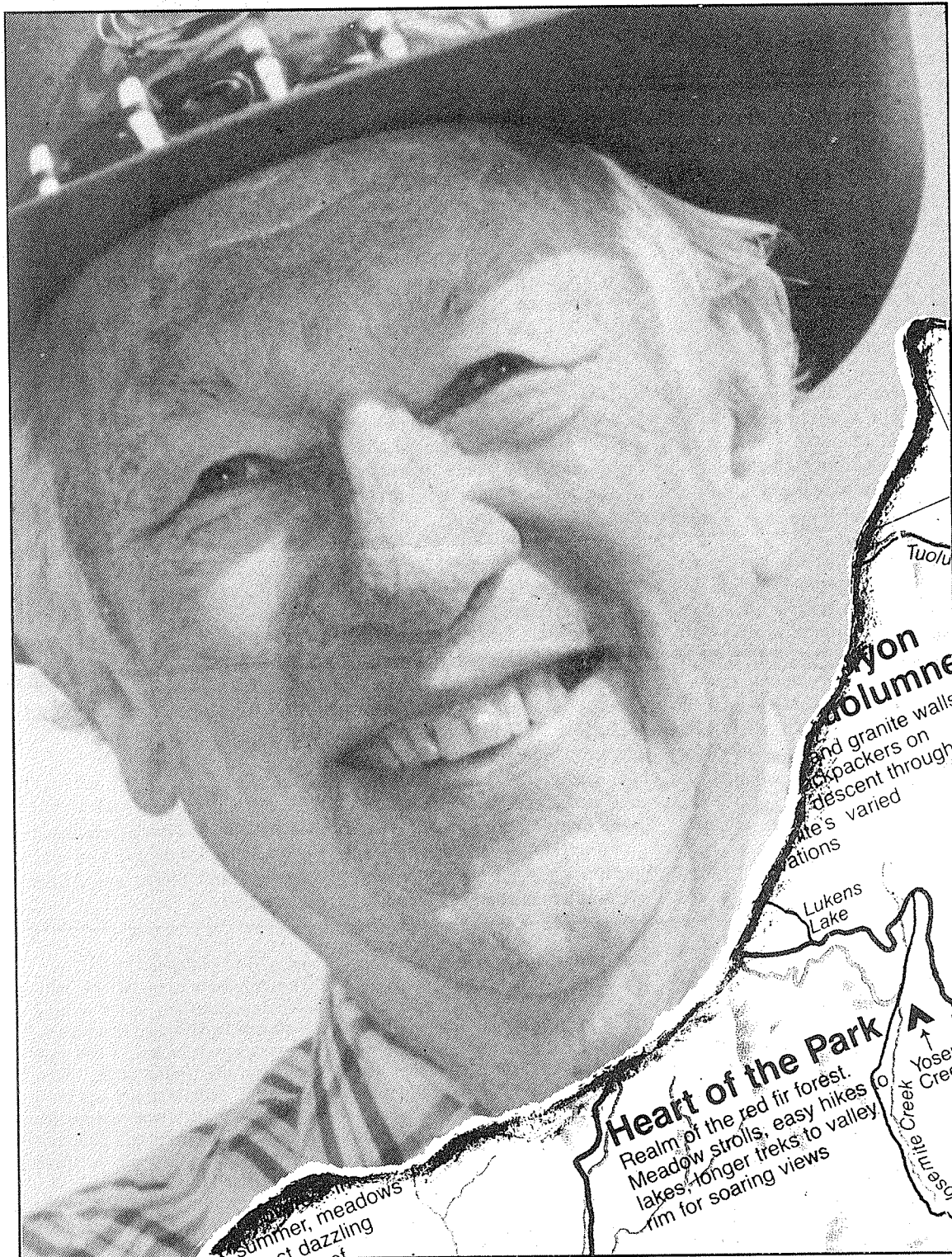
## Environmental ethic

A big, cheery man with a booming voice — one that could carry 2,000 feet to the top of Glacier Point — Bill Lane appears unfailingly cheerful and optimistic.

What is his secret? He likes people and he likes to bring them together. "I try to get different points of view together and get things to move forward," he said. "I try to find something good out of something bad."

"For every problem there's probably some kind of opportunity."

An interview with Bill and Jean Lane in their hilltop home reveals complex strands of two full lives and a common commitment to the environment. Since 1928, the Lane family has had tremendous influence



Bill Lane, a founding father of Portola Valley, publisher of *Sunset Magazine*, and ambassador to Australia, has been named conservationist of the year by the National Parks and Conservation Association for his accomplishments on behalf of national parks.

in the community, as well as larger arenas of business, the state, the nation and the world.

Bill and Mel Lane moved to the San Francisco area from Iowa in 1928 when their father, L.W. "Larry" Lane, bought *Sunset* magazine and began converting it to the famed "Magazine of Western Living" — and a family enterprise. As boys, Bill and Mel used to sell *Sunset* door-to-door.

Bill fell in love with national parks the next year on a trip to Yosemite when he was 9 years old. Later he and Mel worked

summers as packers in Yosemite. That was when he often made the fire call in return for free dance tickets at Camp Curry. "I also did a lot of (horse)shoeing," he said.

The firefall, so long a trademark of Yosemite, was discontinued in 1968.

A journalism degree from Stanford in 1942 was followed by service in the Navy in the South Pacific as a gunnery and communications officer. Just 50 years ago, he was on the beach at the end of the Iwo Jima campaign helping to land Marines who used dogs to chase out Japanese sol-



# Parks in peril

"One of the gifts that America has given to the world is the concept of national parks," says Jean Lane.

Dating back to 1863, when Congress passed and President Lincoln signed a bill protecting Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove "for enjoyment of all people," the United States has led the world in setting aside special lands and monuments.

Yellowstone, established in 1872 was the first official national park in the world. Now, 120 countries have national parks. "This was the first government in the world that set aside environmental areas for the benefit of all people," Bill Lane says.

In the United States, some 300 million people visit 367 national park sites each year. Totalling 80 million acres, these parks range from the great natural wonders of the West to the battlefields and historic sites of the East. Mr. Lane himself helped in establishing the two newest: the California desert parks, and the Presidio in San Francisco.

But national parks are in trouble. Already falling behind in funding, they face new threats from a budget-slashing Congress.

"I don't think the national park system is in peril," Mr. Lane says. "What is in peril involves investment in national parks and keeping them viable for increased visitors."

Visitors to the national parks are increasing by 5 percent each year, and the budget has not kept pace, Mr. Lane says. In particular, new parks have been mandated by Congress, but not adequately funded.

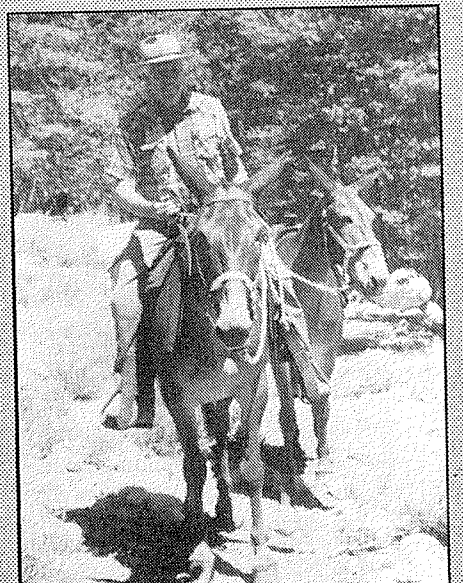
Money is needed to keep up the staff, house them, protect the resources and maintain the scientific research necessary to understand the ecosystems of the parks and their surroundings, he explains.

Mr. Lane strongly opposes closing any national parks — or modifying boundaries — at this time. "It would set a very bad precedent that would open up a political Pandora's box," he says. "In due course that might be a

good idea, but not at this time."

Mr. Lane warms up as he talks about the values of national parks and the challenges facing them. "The big challenge for the future is to protect the integrity of existing national parks and the ecosystems that surround them," he says. "Yosemite is getting acid rain from L.A."

The national parks can advance many of the concerns addressed in the GOP Contract with America, Mr. Lane believes, particularly in relation to youth and education.



As a college student, Bill Lane worked as a packer in Yosemite, nurturing his lifelong love of national parks.

"We should use national parks as classrooms," he says. "They are living labs of things we are trying to teach youth about environment and history."

Most people do not recognize the economic benefits of parks, Mr. Lane stresses. "Our national parks are a

(Continued on next page)

diers still fighting from caves.

Right after the war, Bill and Mel returned to Sunset, where they shaped the magazine that became the bible of western living. Its tawny buildings and glorious gardens are a tourist attraction in Menlo Park.

For 30 years Bill Lane was publisher of the magazine —

He still keeps a fatherly eye on Portola Valley and frequently appears at city meetings to defend the town's unique trail system or chide neighbors gently for threatening to sue rather than working through the process.

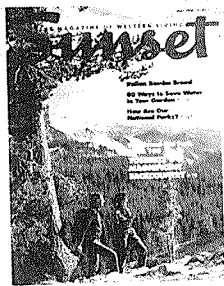
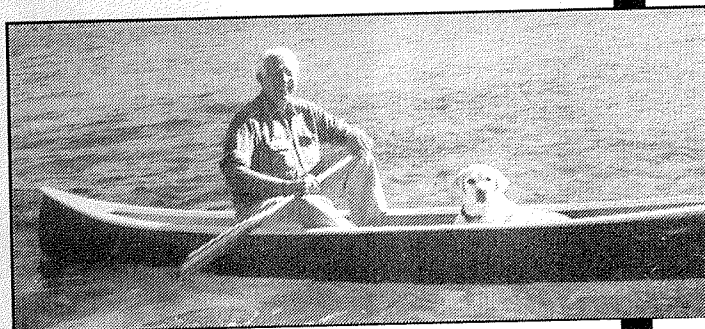
Mr. Lane looks to education for solutions to problems. "When people better understand issues and alternatives, they tend to make better judgments," he said.

**Bill Lane made this clarion call for an environmental ethic in 1969, when the movement to protect the environment was still young. Today, with many conditions in worse shape, the message rings even truer today:**

**"The price (of our activities) in consumption and destruction has been great. Many basic resources within our own boundaries are gone forever. The goose that has been laying the golden eggs is short of good air to breathe, has smarting eyes, wants a drink of good water, is sometimes hungry, is thinking of taking the pill and laying fewer eggs because she's beginning to think the pond is a bit too crowded for swimming, and generally longs for a little peace and quiet to enjoy life.**

**"If we do not act immediately by a wide-range, dedicated effort, we are building castles on a melting iceberg; it seems firm — but is deteriorating from within. We must develop a national environmental ethic to inspire and guide us down this very difficult road. We must, as a people and as a nation, again identify our national values and goals in order to recognize, perhaps, the most basic and worldwide problem facing us."**

**Bill Lane, keynote address, United Nations conference on the environment, San Francisco, 1969**



from 1960 until 1990, when it was sold. During those years, he and Mel built the magazine into a strong voice for the new environmental movement fermenting in the country.

"Sunset was our platform," he said. "Mel and I both had a wonderful base at Sunset. It was a perfect mix of our personal and business interests."

One of his proudest accomplishments was exposing the dangers of DDT. A 1969 article describing the toxic effects of the pesticide provided the base for the laws that eventually got it banned. "We literally blew the whistle on DDT," he said. "We also stopped accepting advertising for DDT."

## Community pillars

In 1954 Bill encountered an attractive young decorator and paint coordinator from Chicago who was traveling with some sorority sisters. "We met in the lobby of Sunset — believe it or not," laughed Mrs. Lane, who is also a musician, cook and gardener.

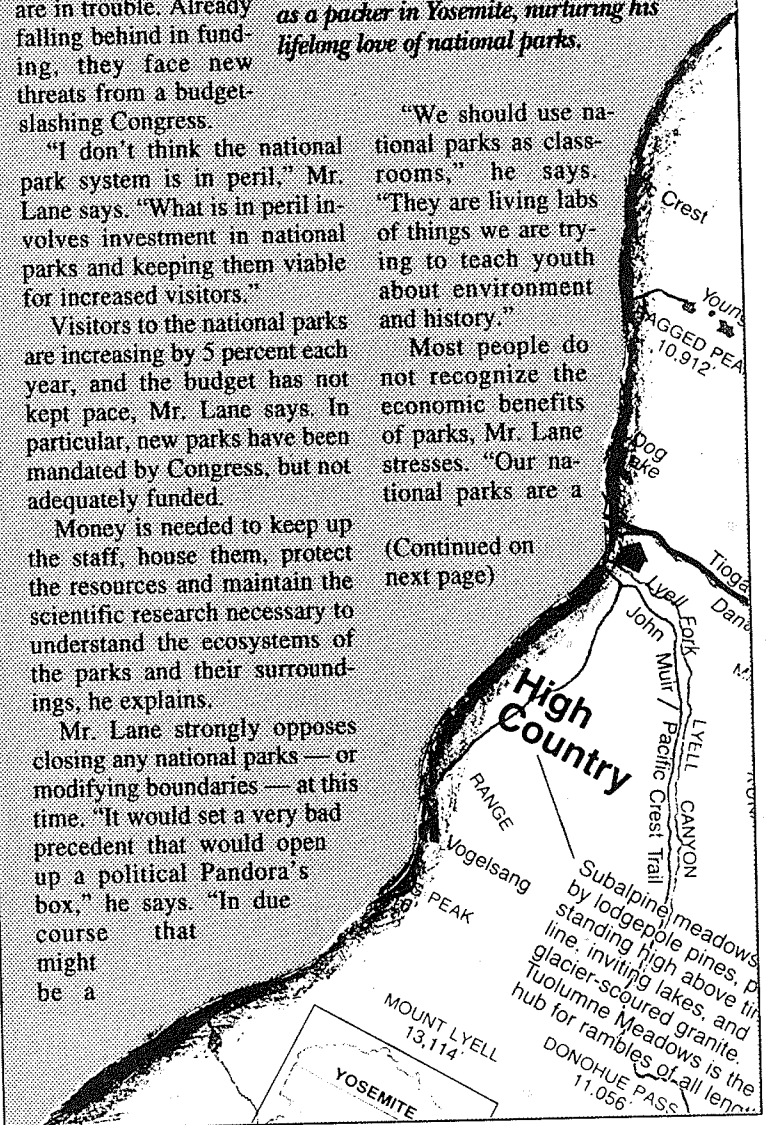
She shares her husband's passion for the environment and has worked for preservation of tropical plants since "years before anyone ever heard of a rain forest." She has been active in the National Tropical Botanical Gardens and served on its board.

The Lanes moved to 10 acres in Portola Valley in 1957, where they still live with six horses. They brought up their three children, Sharon, Bob and Brenda, to love the outdoors, and toured the national parks in a rented Winnebago.

The Lanes have been active members of the community, including the Valley Presbyterian Church, the schools, and particularly the town of Portola Valley.

Bill Lane was one of the founding fathers of Portola Valley and remains active as an elder statesman.

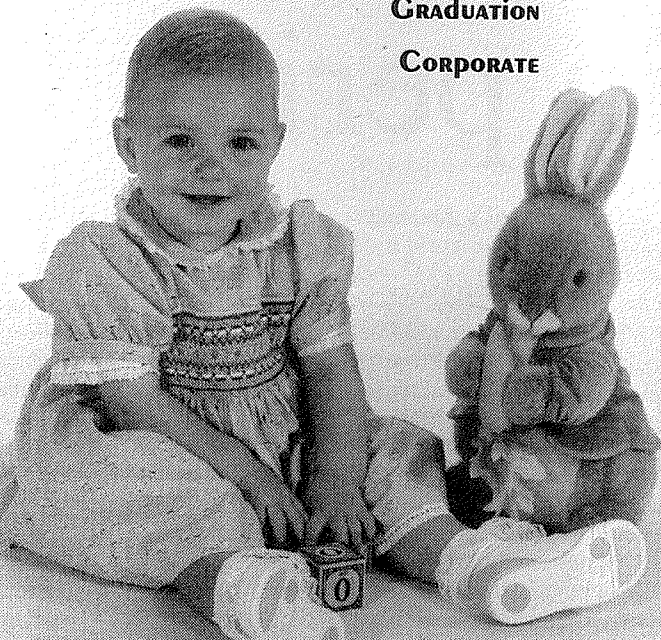
During the early 1960s, he was one of the foresighted residents who saw the threats of development and organized to incorporate the town to gain control over its future. As top vote-getter and member of the first Town Council, he helped fashion Portola Valley's innovative zoning regulations that limited building on slopes and controlled other factors to maximize open space and minimize environmental damage.





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## Parks

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cash cow," he says. "Yosemite  
probably generates annually \$1.5  
billion into the economy."

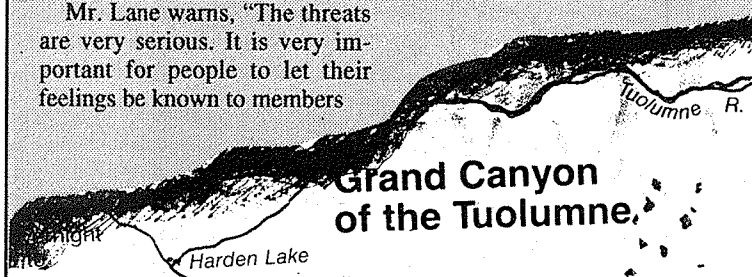
In particular, visiting foreign-  
ers love the national parks.  
"What better way to show off  
our country?" he asks.

Mr. Lane warns, "The threats  
are very serious. It is very im-  
portant for people to let their  
feelings be known to members

of Congress."

Mrs. Lane concludes, "Each  
generation has been steward of  
our natural environment."

To which Mr. Lane adds,  
"What if Lincoln hadn't stopped  
the logging of Mariposa Grove?"



Grand Canyon  
of the Tuolumne.

### For information/action

For general information on national parks,  
contact the National Parks and Conservation  
Association, 1776 Massachusetts Ave., NW,  
Washington, DC 20036; or call (202) 223-  
6722.

The association has published a guide to the  
national parks, the threats facing them, and  
how to get involved. For a copy of "Our En-  
dangered Parks: What You Can Do to Protect  
Our National Heritage," call Foghorn Press at  
(800) FOGHORN.

To make your opinions known, contact your  
representatives in Congress:

■ Rep. Anna Eshoo, 308 Cannon H.O.B.,  
Washington, DC 20515; (202) 225-8104; or  
698 Emerson St., Palo Alto, CA 94301; 323-  
2984.

■ Sen. Dianne Feinstein, 331 Hart Senate  
Office Building, Washington, DC 20510; (202)  
224-3841; or 1700 Montgomery St., Suite 305,  
San Francisco, CA 94111; 249-4777.

■ Sen. Barbara Boxer, 112 Hart Senate Of-  
fice Building, Washington, DC 20510; (202)  
224-3553; 1700 Montgomery St., Suite 240,  
San Francisco, CA 94111; 403-0100.

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