

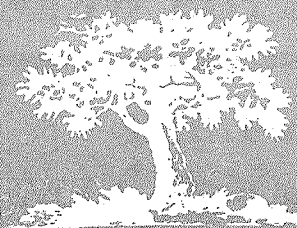
Special section on 'Animals in our Lives': Section 2

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Country

Menlo Park's Almanac



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Three decades of saving landscape

*Donald Aitken and
Lennie Roberts
are leaders in the
Committee for Green
Foothills' fight to
preserve open space.
See Page 8.*



PHOTO BY JONAS GRUSHKIN

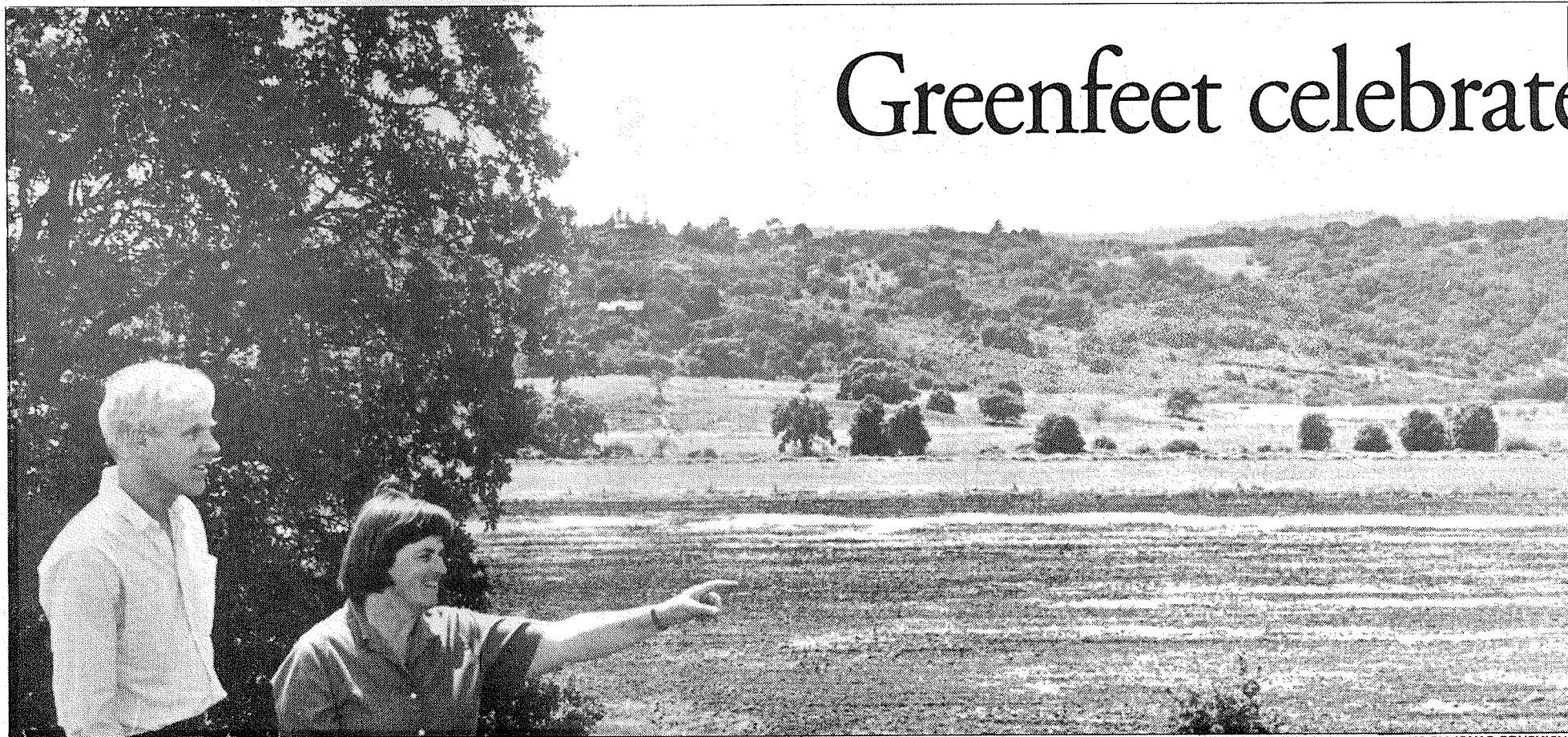


PHOTO BY JONAS GRUSHKIN

COMMITTEE FOR GREEN FOOTHILLS stalwarts, Donald Aitken and Lennie Roberts, overlook the Webb Ranch where horses still graze and vegetables still grow. Thanks in large part to the efforts of Greenfeet, efforts to convert the fields and hills into a lake or industrial park have never taken off.

Starting in 1962, the Committee for Green Foothills has led conservation battles against power lines and logging and for 'saving' the Bay and Coast from massive development. Its 30th birthday party will be held Sunday at Woodhills.

BY MARION SOFTKY

Without the Committee for Green Foothills, the Peninsula might be a very different place.

For 30 years "Greenfeet" have battled to keep the green spaces on the Peninsula as a resource and refuge for harried city dwellers.

In the words of founding President Wallace Stegner, the committee's purpose was "to leave for our children and grandchildren a heritage that has not been dug up and paved over and — it is an ironic word — humanized."

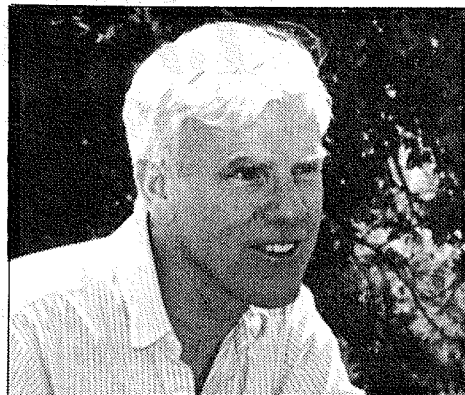
Founded in 1962 to fight "factories in the foothills," the committee has earned both battle scars and victories, from its share in battles ranging from power lines and logging, to "saving" the Bay and Coast.

A key victory for environmentalists was establishment of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District and the Peninsula Open Space Trust. Together these have preserved more than 30,000 acres in the mountains, on the Coastsides and along the shores of San Francisco Bay.

"The open space district is the best thing that has happened," said Prof. Stegner, patron saint and eloquent voice of the committee. "The answer to preserving land is fee simple. You have to own it to control it."

Appropriately, the committee is celebrating its 30th birthday on land saved by the

the district. Woodhills, the home where Fremont and Cora Older entertained literati and notables of the day, has been restored by Almanac publishers Mort and Elaine Levine.



DONALD AITKEN, energy guru and second president of the Committee for Green Foothills: "We have to get our environmental house in order and our economic house in order or the economy won't survive."

Starting with power lines

The threat of massive power lines snaking over the hills to provide megawatts for the new Stanford Linear Accelerator spurred Donald Aitken to change careers.

The young physicist with a fresh Ph.D. from Stanford plunged into the fray. By the time the power lines were redesigned, the fledgling Committee for Green Foothills had learned how to fight the feds, and a young attorney named Pete McCloskey was on his way to Congress.

"It was a very good issue to sharpen our tools to take on utilities and big government," Dr. Aitken says. "We learned you must do your technical homework. And we did."

Dr. Aitken is just one of hundreds of local residents who have contributed to the greening of the Peninsula through the Committee for Green Foothills. He has gone on to become a nationally known energy guru. As an energy specialist for the Union of Concerned Scientists, he now spends his time preaching the necessity of conservation and renewable energy all over the country.

A different vision of the future

If you want a measure of what the environmental movement has accomplished locally, take a look at San Mateo County's Master Plan adopted in 1960.

Then compare that plan, envisioning 1990, with what the county actually looks like in 1992.

The forecasters of the '50s expected new freeways, parkways and rapid transit. New development would stretch down the coast as far as San Gregorio and out into the waters of the Bay. An assortment of new lakes would provide recreation, water supply and flood control.

There would be a dam and lake on the Webb Ranch just under Ladera. A new four-lane "Alpine Parkway" would extend from Alpine Road in Portola Valley over Skyline to serve the new recreation complex on Pescadero Creek.

The plan shows a freeway extending down in the Bay, barely touching the existing bayfront. Homes, industry and marinas would fill the Bay out to the freeway, as much as two miles off shore in some places.

A barrier at the Dumbarton Bridge would control the tides and allow more intense development on the shores of the South Bay.

The Willow Freeway would run across the new Dumbarton Barrier through Menlo Park and end at 280 where it would become an expressway to the Coast. Wallace Stegner, founding President of the Committee for Green Foothills, described the proposed freeway as "a loaded and cocked gun, aimed straight at the heart of the last splendid open space on the Peninsula."

The 1960 plan, prepared for the county by William Spangle of Ladera, projected a 1990 county population of 800,000. The

1990 census gave the county close to 650,000 people — 150,000 less than planned.

What happened?

The environmental movement happened. The Committee for Green Foothills, founded in 1962, was a leader in the local effort to preserve the natural landscape of the Peninsula.

"People suddenly realized that the thing that attracted them to the Bay Area was at risk," says Lennie Roberts, who has for almost 15 years represented "Greenfeet" before the government bodies that decide what will happen. "They woke up and said, 'Let's preserve this.'"

Adds Donald Aitken, the second president of the Committee for Green Foothills: "There is no way you could lay the 1960 vision on people now and get anywhere. No one in his right mind would propose such things."

Now, thanks to the efforts of the Com-

mittee for Green Foothills and many others, large areas of the county are legally protected. The Bay, the South Coast, the Watershed, steep slopes and landslides, all have laws and agencies to protect them. The public now owns large areas of parks and open space in the hills and along the Coast and Bay.

To a large extent the new issues will focus on urban areas and transportation corridors. "The new questions have to do with density control in urban areas," says Dr. Aitken.

"Affordable housing is the real issue of the '90s. Multi-million dollar homes in the hills don't solve growth problems," he says.

Nevertheless, environmentalists must remain vigilant, warns Mrs. Roberts. "I don't think anything is over. The terms of the debate have changed," she says.

Mrs. Roberts repeats the old conservationist's motto, "Victories are temporary; defeats are permanent."

30 years of preserving the landscape

Lennie Roberts of Ladera is another. She has been fighting conservation battles for more than 20 years. For the last 15 she has been the voice of the committee before county supervisors and government agencies charged with land-use decisions.

From logging to golf courses or development on the coast, she is always there to present the environmental point of view. She is so well informed that, for a while, she was referred to as the "sixth member of the Board of Supervisors." The board has five real members.

Mrs. Roberts is adept at juggling many battles at once. Besides fighting for open space, she also pays attention to urban issues. She favors concentrating housing along transportation corridors and serves on both

the County Housing Task Force and the Mid-Peninsula Citizens for Fair Housing. She also serves on the task force looking for an environmentally acceptable location for a new public golf course.

Mrs. Roberts advises: "Pick your fights. Pick the most important ones. Pay attention to getting strong regulations, and see that

Wallace Stegner said the purpose of the Committee for Green Foothills was 'to leave for our children and grandchildren a heritage that has not been dug up and paved over and - it is an ironic word - humanized.'

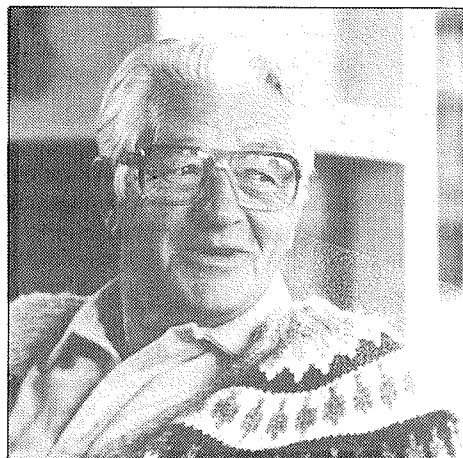
they are followed. Be ready and willing to fight to see that they are enforced."

Mrs. Roberts' greatest satisfaction was the 1986 vote passing Measure A, which locked in the county's Local Coastal Plan so it could not be changed without a vote of the people. "The Coast is reasonably secure because of Measure A," she says.

But now she's ringing the alarms again. A new petition is about to be circulated exempting the 860-acre Cassinelli Ranch just south of Half Moon Bay from the urban limits set by Measure A. The exemption would allow a hotel and conference center with golf courses to be built on prime agricultural land. "It's a Coast-buster," she says.



LENNIE ROBERTS, legislative advocate for the Committee for Green Foothills: "Even in the last 14 years, there's been a change in public attitudes. We now have an alert and active public."



WALLACE STEGNER, honorary president of the Committee for Green Foothills: "The Committee for Green Foothills ... was organized to try to save for everyone, for the hostile and indifferent as well as the committed, some of the health that flows down across the green ridges from the Skyline, and some of the beauty and refreshment of spirit that are still available to any resident of the valley who has a moment, and the wit, to lift up his eyes unto the hills."

Anniversary party on May 3

The Committee for Green Foothills will celebrate its 30th anniversary Sunday, May 3, from 3 to 6 p.m. at the historic Fremont Older home in the 734-acre Fremont Older Open Space Preserve.

The celebration will include tours of the restored home and gardens, awards to three Bay Area journalists, and refreshments.

Bill Curtiss of Woodside, head of the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, will speak.

The weekend of celebration will also include hikes with environmental leaders in the hills, coast and baylands.

For tickets at \$40 each, details on where to meet, or information on hikes, call 494-7158.

CALENDAR: Please submit information two weeks in advance of the Almanac's publication date.

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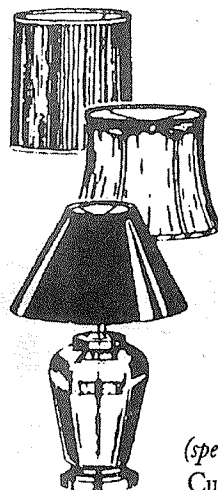
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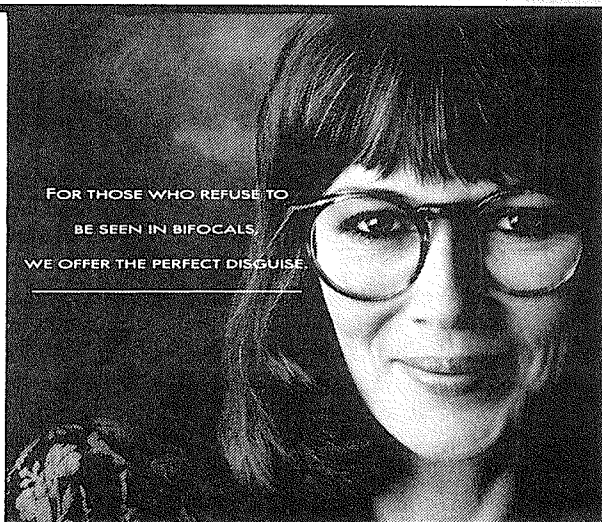
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