

# Muir Heritage Land Trust celebrates 20th

**M**ARTINEZ'S OWN Muir Heritage Land Trust is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year.

Originally named the Martinez Regional Land Trust, it was established on July 26, 1989, by a group of local environmentalists. Since then it has grown into a dynamic organization with broad citizen, governmental and business support.

The organization's annual fundraiser, the Fresh Aire Affaire, held in the pear orchard at the John Muir National Historical Site on Aug. 15, was elegant.

It featured a champagne reception, gourmet food, a jazz quartet and brandy made from pears grown in the John Muir orchard.

Doug O'Connell of "Bay Area Backroads" fame was the master of ceremonies. The program included a six-minute film and an auction conducted by local auctioneer John Pereira. And the items auctioned off were impressive: a Wine Country tour, a week at the Jersey shore and a Sea Ranch vacation home, among others.

Symbolically, the gala occurred on the 40th anniversary of Woodstock, which was the apogee of the 1960s counterculture. A number of people at the Fresh Aire Affaire, now in their 60s and 70s, were of the Woodstock generation.

This is not to say that they were all smoking dope and listening to Janis Joplin then (although perhaps some were). But that generation (to which I belong) was coming into adulthood when environmental protection became a national political issue.

Congress passed the National Environmental Policy Act in 1969. This originated the environmental impact report, which is



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now a standard part of land-use planning. California's Environmental Quality Act is patterned after it.

In 1970, Congress withdrew funding for the supersonic transport because the public perceived it as environmentally offensive. And on April 22 of that year America celebrated the first Earth Day.

Inspired by the environmental movement, people began demanding air and water pollution controls and toxic cleanups, and started local enterprises such as recycling programs and land trusts.

The Muir Heritage Land Trust is just one of many land trusts formed by citizens with a desire to preserve open space. These endeavors are a legacy of the movement that took off in 1969.

The Trust's success has attracted corporate support and gobs of grant money. Corporate logos of Shell Oil, Tesoro Refining Company, Union Bank and Dow Chemical, among others, spanned over the Fresh Aire Affaire's oak-studded dining area.

This corporate presence suggests that supporting the land trust is not just good for the environment; it is good business. And the fact that many corporate-sponsor employees were there shows that they, as individuals, support open space preservation and want their employers to as well.

So you may ask: What projects is the Muir Heritage Land Trust pursuing in this 20th anniversary year? According to executive director Linus Eukel, it has an ambitious agenda.

In 2007, acquisition was completed of the Fernandez property, a 702-acre parcel near the Franklin Canyon Golf Course. The organization was then turning to raising funds for restoration and stewardship of the property.

It now has \$3 million committed and is embarking on the project, which will include building trails and restoring Rodeo Creek to its natural state.

The trust signed an agreement in August 2009 to purchase a 483-acre parcel contiguous to the Fernandez property. It must raise \$2.6 million by June 2010 to complete the

purchase.

This certainly seems a daunting task, but Eukel assured me that the group would not have entered into the transaction without appropriate confidence that the funds could be raised.

The two properties aggregate 1,185 acres of open space, which were slated for development. The area also encompasses almost a fifth of the Rodeo Creek watershed, a fragile ecosystem, within its boundaries. Moreover, the acreage is not fragmented by any intervening private property.

This is what the Muir Heritage Land Trust has striven to accomplish: serially tying up parcels to maximize open space and wildlife habitat.

As if these projects weren't enough of a challenge, the trust launched a five-year Keep It Wild

campaign in 2008. The goal is to raise \$8.5 million to purchase and restore key central Contra Costa County open spaces and provide environmental education and funds for the organization.

The group has preserved more than 2,000 acres of open space in its first 20 years. This will infuse environmental consciousness into future generations and provide them open space to enjoy — all for free.

The next 20 years will be equally successful only if people continue to step forward and support the Muir Heritage Land Trust's invaluable work.

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