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William Penn Mott award ceremony returns in person after pandemic

By Sora O'Doherty



Winners of the William Penn Mott Jr. Environmental Award, from left: Bruce McGurk and Jan Chushman, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts; Erica Bains, Friends of the Orinda Nature Area, Barbara Leitner, Botanist, and Toris Jaeger, Naturalist. Photo Sora O'Doherty

stewardship.

In addition, the Friends present an annual Olive Festival and the Wildlife Festival where adults and children can experience nature activities and learn more about the local flora and fauna. Unfortunately, severe winter storms caused significant damage to the Nature Area which remains closed while repairs are made. Hopefully, it will reopen in the fall of 2023.

Since 1957, Orinda Scouts have beautified areas around the city and enhanced the local environment. To recognize and honor these decades-long contributions, The Orinda Association (OA) chose Orinda Eagle Scouts and Gold Scouts to receive the William Penn Mott, Jr. Environmental Award for 2022.

To earn the Gold Award rank, Girl Scouts must spend a minimum of 80 hours on their projects and demonstrate extraordinary leadership in developing sustainable solutions to local, national and global challenges.

To earn scouting's Eagle advancement rank, boys and girls must fulfill requirements in leadership, service and outdoor skills, in addition to completing at least 21 merit badges and organizing and leading a service project for the betterment of the community. Over the years, many Eagle Scout projects have added to the environment of the Orinda Nature Area.

The 2019 winner of the William Penn Mott Jr. Environmental Award is botanist Barbara Leitner, a native plant expert, environmental consultant and longtime community volunteer. Leitner is a past president of the East Bay Chapter of the California Native Plant Society and a board member of Friends of Orinda Creeks. She frequently volunteers at the nonprofit Natives Here Nursery in Tilden Park, and her home was featured in the 2023 Bringing Back the Natives Tour last month.

Leitner was nominated by Cinda MacKinnon on behalf of Friends of Orinda Creeks. MacKinnon praised Leitner for a tree survey that tagged and mapped more than 218 trees along San Pablo Creek in Orinda Village as part of a creek restoration project. Leitner, who has lived in Orinda for 30 years with her husband Steve Leitner, has worked for the city as a consultant for over 20 years offering advice about creek restoration. ?

The William Penn Mott, Jr. award, is given annually in memory of 50-year Orinda resident William Penn Mott, Jr. The award is presented to an Orinda resident, group of residents or organization which has worked for the preservation, improvement, promotion or educational use of Orinda's environmental and ecological assets.

? Often described as "Mr. Parks" and a "modern day John Muir," Mott worked for 60 years to create tens of thousands of acres of parkland at the national, state, regional and local levels. He headed the National Park Service (NPS), the California park systems, Oakland's city parks, the East Bay Regional Parks and the

The Orinda Association on Sunday, June 4 presented the 2023 William Penn Mott Jr. Environmental Award to the Friends of the Orinda Nature Area in a ceremony at the Wilder Art and Garden Center. At the same ceremony, the OA also honored two previous awardees, since they had been unable to hold an in-person event during the COVID-19 pandemic. The award for 2022 went to Orinda Eagle and Gold Scouts and the 2019 award went to Barbara M. Leitner.

The Friends of the Orinda Nature Area support the Nature Area adjacent to Wagner Ranch Elementary School as a natural environment and a historical site with the goal of enhancing environmental conservation for the community. The Orinda Nature Area features 18 acres of meadow, forest, ponds and streams and is a certified Schoolyard Habitat by the National Wildlife Federation.

More than 15,000 children have experienced the Nature Area since 1970 through a variety of programs that help students embrace the connection between themselves and their environment and fostering a lifelong

Moraga parks department.

At the time of his death in 1992, the 82-year-old Mott was serving as a special assistant to the NPS, working on the conversion plans for civilian use of the Presidio of San Francisco,. Locally, Mott was a founding member of The Orinda Association and served as its first president.

Reach the reporter at: sora@lamorindaweekly.com

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