



the Park Bell

St. Mary's Park Improvement Club, Est. 1941

March 2010

Sunshine Report by Mia Alioto

Happy March St. Mary's Park! This month's theme is Green....

Green is for my ongoing resolution to be a more 'green' conscious person. Did you know San Francisco already diverts almost three-quarters of its waste away from its landfill? More importantly, as of October last year, a city ordinance was passed that now makes recycling and composting mandatory! So fill those green bins with all your yard trimmings and food scraps...even soiled paper and dryer lint too. Help keep organic material out of the landfill and turn it into a product useful for soil restoration. Just follow the clearly marked signs on each of your garbage containers. Call up Sunset Scavenger with any questions you may have, and ask them to provide you with a free small kitchen composting bin and biobags to make it easy to compost from your kitchen. I fill mine up every day and barely use the disposal anymore, which also conserves electricity.

Green also comes in the form of money, as in paying your yearly SMPIC dues. For keeping St. Mary's Park looking beautiful, providing great events and printing this informative newsletter, it really is a small amount of green. So look out for our new Club Ambassador, Antonio Catpo, who will be going door-to-door throughout the neighborhood in March to answer questions you may have about the Improvement Club and encouraging you to help green our treasury department with your dues.

Green marks the calendar in March for St. Patrick's Day. I know there are many residents with either a lot or just a wee bit of Irish blood in them, so with a lager in my hand, I toast... "Sláinte agus saol agat!" (Health and long life).

Important Dates

First and foremost, I must have been eating too many chocolate hearts last month to forget some of my favorite neighbors' birthdays!

Former Sergeant of Arms, Heather Baria celebrated on Feb 21st on the way to Hawaii where her boys Quinn and Nico were baptized the day after a tsunami scare. Welcome back Barias from an eventful trip! The fabulous Nathan Fox of College Ave turned 6 super hero style on Feb 19th while his Mommy Erin will follow him in her Wonder Woman cape on March 13th.

On March 7th SMPIC stalwart and hard working editor of the *Park Bell*, Thompson Chambers celebrates his birthday in style this year at a black tie Oscar Party. Have a blast and may all your favorites win! After Lisa Everson MD returns from her annual trip to Guatemala, where she donates her medical skills to the poor and rural people, she will gracefully turn 50 on the 18th. Her family is throwing her a big bash in the beauty of Stern Grove. I hope all your good karma pays off with good weather for you Lisa! Madeleine Bedwell of lower Benton will wear her spring dress when she turns 8 on March 27th. And a long time park resident and my sweet neighbor Ms. Emilia Smith turns 84 on March 24th.

This month's special birthday wishes are for an adorable couple, Mr. and Mrs. Booth of College Ave. John Booth (who celebrated his on Feb 12th), and the effervescent Lois who celebrated her birthday on March 2nd with her daughter, shopping for a new purse and shoes and lunched at the Cheesecake Factory. Not bad for a young-at-heart girl turning 83! John had lived in St. Mary's back in the 60's in what is now Guido and Marie's home. He had left after his first marriage and was very busy as a purchasing agent for a steam ship freight company, as well as an active member of the Temple Guard. John met Lois at a dinner dance at the Masonic Lodge. They went to West Lake Joes for their first date and still go there often. Lois was no stranger to St. Mary's because she lived right next to St. Mary's College in Moraga where she could tell the time from the ringing of the campus bells. John convinced her to move with him back to San Francisco by promising sun in a little rural neighborhood and landed back on College Ave. They totally renovated the place and loved having 49er parties in their

pine paneled basement party room. Neighbors say John has 9 lives and Lois won a trip to Hawaii, so they consider themselves very lucky folks. It must have been because they tied the knot on St. Patrick's Day in 1977. Loving life and keeping busy caring for John, her friends and family, Lois warmed my heart with her lovely stories and yummy cookies. Happy Anniversary you two!



Recent photo of Lois and John Booth in their College Ave home. Photo by Mia Alioto.

Dog News.....

The Club sends condolences to Libby Subers and her family for the loss of their dog Max who passed away on February 18th. Also, look for the new furry face of Valentina the puppy toting Mary Ramirez and Helen Lopez around the hood. And sorry to report that the SMP Dog Park remains closed at least 2 more weeks due to its muddy condition.

I shall close my lengthy report this month with a quick announcement about Tuesday's Senior Bingo which is on vacation until March 23rd. Sign ups for Rec Dept Spring programs starts March 10th. And finally an Irish saying... "Dance as if no one's watching, sing as if no one's listening, and live every day as if it were your last."

Mia Alioto 415-239-0123 or mia@oneglovestudios.com

St. Mary's Park Family
looking for
St. Mary's Park Babysitter

- sit for a 5th-grade girl
- for early evenings
- some weekends

Please call 415-333-3800 if interested.

UPCOMING EVENTS

SMPIC March Executive Committee Meeting

**Tuesday, March 9th, 7:30 pm
40 Genebern Way**

All SMP Residents Invited

Tentative Agenda:

- Safety/Crime meeting with Ingleside Police Rep
- Treasurer's 2009 Financial report
- Final Easter Egg hunt planning
- Neighborhood-wide SAFE program – next steps?

SMPIC Easter Egg Hunt

**Saturday, April 3rd, 10 am
Behind the SMP Rec Center**

Last Meeting Minutes — February 9th, 2010

Mary Ramirez, Secretary

Alex Minn called the meeting to order. In addition to Alex, Mary Ramirez, Vanessa Villacarlos, Guido Guinasso, Penny Mitchell, Lisa Everson, Mia Alioto and Gladys Soto were present.

The annual SMPIC Easter Egg Hunt event -- scheduled for Saturday, April 3rd at 10:00 a.m. -- was discussed. On Sunday, March 28th at 2:00 p.m. approximately 1200 Easter eggs will be stuffed with wrapped candies. Donations of child friendly prizes are also needed. If anyone can help with these event prep tasks – or can volunteer for the concession stand during the event – please contact Vanessa at 415-810-3720. Raffle tickets will be sold at the event for prizes. A permit needs to be secured for the use of the Rec Center and field. The gondola will be used again this year as well as a visit from the S. F. Fire Department. The ordering of more SMP t-shirts was discussed and now has been finalized. We will use the same St. Mary's Park design as before, but the colors will change to gray with navy printing. An order of 200 shirts has been placed and will be available in small, medium, large, and x-large, short and long sleeves. Hopefully they will be ready for purchase at the Easter Egg Hunt. Alex asked that we spread the word about SAFE, the neighborhood park watch program. Many thanks to Penny Mitchell for hosting the meeting in her lovely home. Next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 9th at Matt Lauer's home.

Watching the Birdy: Get Started Birding the Park

[the second of a two-part series continued from last month]

Kass McMahon

Be prepared to often be mystified or baffled, no matter how long you've been birding. Why? Because birds' appearances change throughout the year, and often appear different, depending upon light and distance. Many types of birds look confusingly similar to others (there are MANY different sparrow types, for example, and they mostly all "look the same" to us until we begin to register the more subtle, but reliable differences). Our own "internal" visualizations of a bird can sometimes cloud what we're seeing too. That's where a good, reliable field guide comes in.

Get the Book

There are a number of guides out there, some with photographic illustrations, others with drawings. They present different images of the birds, and describe various plumages and differences between species. They also indicate migration patterns and seasonal ranges, as well as feeding, nesting and other behaviors. All of these help you solve the many mysteries you see outside your windows. Even so, sometimes you may see a bird that you just can't puzzle out, and that's part of the joy of investigation. Sometimes, you may get a "vagrant" – a bird that by all accounts has no business being in this area, but there it is! Your field guide is your knowledge base, and it not only helps you resolve mysteries, but confirms your good observations!

The Coarse to the Refined (bird characteristics and observation skills)

It is easiest to start out recognizing adult male birds, and then to understand what females and juveniles look like. From there you'll begin to categorize types of birds. A male's plumage is often the most dramatic and easily recognizable. They can feature deeper colors, or more colors than their female counterparts, although that's not always the case (for example, most types of wrens share similar plumages). Seeing a male can be a "map" for identifying the females too. If you see a male House Finch, with its recognizable red (or orange) face and upper breast, look around, and that drabber, more uniformly brown-streaked bird of a similar size nearby is likely the female House Finch. However, throw this into the mix as well: birds' feathers become worn and drab due

to weather and age, leading to color differences, and they usually molt once or twice a year. A bird's breeding plumage is likely to be fairly different from its winter plumage as well (which can make males and females look quite similar), and the same is true for the different appearance of a bird in its "juvenile" plumage (often lasting up to a year, depending on species).

If gazing at a bird's coloring doesn't help you identify it, then you'll need to call upon your secondary and tertiary methods of identification to figure out what you're seeing: its size, its shape, its song or call, and its behavior. A California Towhee is similar in shape and size to an American Robin, especially from a distance. If you can't make out coloring differences, watch its behavior. A Robin is often in a tree or on the grass hopping around, looking for bugs or worms. A Towhee will be on the ground too, but more likely along the edges of paths or yards, or beneath hedges and trees, because it searches for bugs beneath leaves and debris. Watch more closely, and you'll see the Towhee actually hops backward, as a means to scrape up the leaves and look beneath them for food.

Become a Superhero

Lastly, you cannot underestimate the value of binoculars in bird watching. This is the most essential tool. This is what transforms you from an ordinary citizen into an acutely cognizant superhero with laser-like vision and an uncanny ability to detect the tiniest details over vast distances which no mortal can match.

A word on binoculars in general: the "glasses" you buy should reflect how much you want to see. They can be expensive, but on the other hand, better optics provides vastly better views than poor ones. On the other hand, ANY binoculars are better than the naked eye, so even moderately priced ones (such as \$100 or so) can be great to start out with. You want to try out as many different kinds as you can, so that you can determine for yourself what you're satisfied with. The most important thing is the amount of light the optics let in, followed by sharpness/crispness of image, field of view, and heft/comfort in your hand. Check out the optics other people use – birders are great about sharing their tools and their observations.

There you go - the keys to birding are letting the birds teach us, puzzling out mysteries, and learning from each other how to interpret what we see. Happy birding!

SMPIC Officer's Op-Ed

Mia Alioto

March is School Choice month. Letters will be arriving soon across SMP letting the parents of soon-to-be kindergarteners, middle and high schoolers know where their children have been assigned. This is the last year of the controversial lottery system. From here on out it looks like the district will be making assignments at neighborhood schools (SMP residents take note -- your local assignment will likely be the Junipero Serra School).

In the Park, the 1-100 block of Genebern is a good microcosm of what school choice can do to a neighborhood. Kids on that block attend Rooftop, Commodore Sloat, Harvey Milk, the San Francisco School and Mission High School. Genebern resident Anne Marie Feld (and mother of Pascale and Liam) has written a story on the struggle around school choice and their difficult decision to move Pascale to another school 2 weeks into the school year. You can read it at: <http://www.edutopia.org/switching-schools>

While school choice can be hard, what's more challenging is ensuring that your child gets a solid education. Last year, California ranked 49th out of 50 in educational status nationally. Parents around the city are mobilizing to fight the budget cuts that will cripple an already failing system. Here's what you can do:

Attend SFUSD's Community Budget Meetings. This is an opportunity to understand and discuss how SFUSD is making cuts in the budget. More information at: http://portal.sfusd.edu/template/?page=business_services.budget_updates

Attend Rallies (like the Statewide Day of Action Rally that was held on March 4th at Civic Center Plaza). Show unity with teachers and parents in demanding adequate education funding in California. More information at: <http://www.uesf.org/defend/march-4.html>

Support New Legislative Actions, including:

- Support lowering the 2/3 threshold to pass a state budget and increase revenue. There are a number of groups proposing solutions, including www.californians4democracy.com

- Sign a petition to get the "Local Funding of Local Classrooms Act" on the November state ballot at: www.improvedschoolfunding.org This initiative aims to lower the threshold to pass a parcel tax from

2/3 to 55%. This is crucial to giving local districts the option to fund schools locally.

- Call Legislators. The PTA is starting a month-long calling campaign this month to our state legislators demanding change to public education funding. Join them by emailing: legislative@sfpta.org You will be assigned a day to make calls to all four of San Francisco's state legislators and will be given a script of talking points to follow.

I hope this information has been useful to those of you who have children in the Park and are dealing with the San Francisco public school system. The more involved parents we are, the better off our children will be.

SMPIC Financial Report

Matt Lauer, Treasurer

I am glad to report to the neighborhood that the 2009 financial books have been closed and fully reconciled; and that the SMPIC continues to be in good financial position. Last year's revenue was up slightly from 2008 and accompanied by a slight decrease in expenses -- for 2009, revenue increased by 4% with expenses decreased by about 4%. Cash on hand also increased from the prior year. Though we also saw a 5% increase in the number of households that paid SMPIC dues, that total still only represents about one-half the households in the Park. So I would like to remind everyone that on top of all the great events that the Club runs on behalf of the Park, SMPIC also spends a lot of money to maintain the islands, medians and other common areas. The SMPIC spends over 50% of its annual budget on keeping these areas looking good to the benefit of the entire neighborhood. Thanks to those who paid their 2009 dues, the Club was able to provide the services you have come to expect and remained financially sound. SMPIC is now accepting 2010 dues and I will be sending reminders out in the mail next month.

Murray Street Traffic Initiative Update

Mark Risher

After a lengthy delay, the City installed traffic counting equipment along a stretch of Murray Street recently to measure the volume and frequency of cars flowing through the neighborhood.

According to Jackie Vo from SFMTA, two traffic measurement instruments were installed during the first week of February to record both the number of vehicles and

their speed. The information will be compiled by the city and used to determine the priority and severity of the problem and which abatement techniques to consider.

This is the first action the City has taken since a packet containing over 30 signatures was submitted on September 25, 2009. According to Manito Velasco, also of SFMTA, all traffic calming projects were put on hold while the city negotiated a new contract with the contractor that performs this measurement, and only resumed in the new year.

The traffic counting equipment consisted of a series of air-filled rubber tubes, which are compressed by the weight of a passing car, triggering a signal in the attached recording box.

It is unclear how quickly the city will act based upon these measurements. Interested neighbors can contact Supervisor Campos's office to reiterate the importance of the case at (415) 554-5144.

What's Cookin' in St. Mary's Park?

Penny Mitchell

There's nothing like a warm drink and a slice of cake when you can't seem to escape the cold and wet weather. Well, Heather Baria from College Ave has just the solution. She is offering up a recipe that is sure to put a smile on your face and help you through those gloomy days of winter.

Sour Cream Coffee Cake

1 cup sour cream

Topping - Mix together:

1/3 cup brown sugar

1/2 cup granulated sugar

1 tsp cinnamon

First Mixture - Cream/mix together:

1 stick softened butter

1 cup granulated sugar

1 tsp vanilla

2 eggs

Second Mixture - Sift together:

2 cups flour

1/2 tsp salt

1 tsp baking soda

1 tsp baking powder

Mix the second mixture to the first, alternating with the sour cream. Pour half of the mixture into greased 9 x 13 pan; sprinkle half of the topping mixture onto batter; spoon remaining batter into pan (it will spread as it bakes). Add remaining topping. Bake at 350 degrees for 25 minutes or until golden brown.

Don't forget to share your favorite recipe. Simply forward your name, contact number and recipe to 4penny@gmail.com or drop it in my mailbox at 512 College Avenue.