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**Judith M. Wilson** is a feature writer who enjoys telling a wide variety of stories reflecting life in the North Bay, from art to agriculture to the mysteries of sparkling wine. She is a regular contributor to *NorthBay Biz*, and her work has appeared in *North Bay Woman* and *Marin Independent Journal*’s special sections. She also writes theater reviews for telli.com. Previously, she worked as a newspaper reporter and editor in the educational book publishing industry.
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30 Years of Transformative Solutions:
2019 National Bioneers Conference
by Lindsey Siegele
Polina Smith recites Bertold Brecht’s words while discussing the influence of art and artists at the National Bioneers Conference. As the annual event’s art curator, Smith has witnessed the inextricable link between art and activism.

“Being able to access these big issues not only through our analytical minds but through our hearts is unspeakably important,” she says.

Big issues—from environmental protection and restorative agriculture to regenerative economies and Indigenous rights—are exactly why thousands of attendees from across the U.S. and around the world have been attending the annual Bioneers Conference for 30 years. They come to learn about solutions to today’s most pressing challenges from the top minds and innovators spanning countless topics. More importantly, they come to be inspired.

“Bioneers is a place that's really understanding the intersectional power of liberation,” says Alixa Garcia, part of the spoken-word duo Climbing Poetree who have performed at Bioneers several times. “This is one of those oases we need in a time of catastrophe, where we get to come together and share ideas.”

30 Years of Solutions

The seeds from which Bioneers has flourished were planted in the ’80s by Kenny Ausubel and Nina Simons. Ausubel was a filmmaker and Simons’ background was in theater and
Both had a passion for telling stories and envisioned inspiring a movement to build a more just future.

Simons and Ausubel recall a transformational visit to Gabriel Howearth, master gardener and seedsman at Seeds of Change in New Mexico, the company that Ausubel had founded, focused on building backyard biodiversity.

“That garden was the most glorious co-creation I’d ever seen: a garden of relationships,” Simons says. “Gabriel knew each plant better than many people know their own families. He grimly described the cascading loss of biodiversity in the food system. Industrial agriculture and agribusiness corporations were speeding the loss of varieties, a treacherous threat to our collective future.

“As I left the garden, I felt the spirit of the natural world tap me

The Planetary Dance, above and below, is a participants-welcome ritual dance to restore health and peace to the planet.
on the shoulder and say, ‘You’re working for me now.’ I returned home, quit my job and went to work for Bioneers, embarking on the steepest learning curve of my life.”

Thirty years of learning and growing have turned what was once a small seed of an idea into an experience and destination celebrated by changemakers the world over. Veterans of the Bioneers stage include author Michael Pollan, mycologist Paul Stamets, the Biomimicry Institute’s Janine Benyus, actor and activist Danny Glover, author and entrepreneur Paul Hawken and The Pachamama Alliance Co-Founders Bill and Lynne Twist.

Bioneers is an inspiring “meeting of the minds,” but it’s also a creative meeting of the hearts.

**Art at Every Turn**

When walking through the gates of the Bioneers Conference, currently held in San Rafael, California, the influence of the arts is impossible to miss.

“Bioneers doesn’t attempt to separate form and content,” says Conference Senior Producer J.P. Harpignies. “We believe our aesthetics have to reflect our worldview. People are not just nourished by the ideas—it’s also the visuals. We try to be conscious of what the human experience is.”

Walking along the conference grounds in years past, attendees would encounter art and performances in off-stage installations—such as an original “nest” built by natural artist Nate Hogan or one of Lucien Dante’s larger-than-life “Gargoyles” made from wool, hair, wood, metal, paint, clay and natural materials—and enjoy performances by featured musicians. Attendees might’ve even caught a “Trashion” show: a trash-to-high-fashion show developed by Truckee High’s Envirolution Club.

*Joel Dean*
past, including Terry Tempest Williams and Eve Ensler, both of whom will return to the stage this October.

The backdrop of the Bioneers main stage has itself been a canvas. Each year, Cara Romero, a celebrated Chemehuevi photographer and director of Bioneers’ Indigeneity Program, has developed a backdrop concept that makes art omnipresent behind every main stage event. In 2018, colorful, hand-painted animal sculptures by artist Daniel McCoy Jr. (Muskogee Creek/Potawatomi) hung along the stage’s curtain. McCoy will participate in Romero’s concept again in 2019.

Bioneers hopes to be an oasis for years to come. “When people are on the conference grounds, they feel activated,” says Bioneers Executive Director Joshua Fouts. “We view art as a vehicle for cultural change. Often, given the heavy material that people are processing at Bioneers, having a space filled with art serves as a kind of doula for transformation.”

Don’t Miss the 2019 Bioneers Art

“In honor of Bioneers’ 30th anniversary celebration, we’re hoping to activate the grounds with more art than ever,” says curator Polina Smith. Attend October 18 to 20 at the Marin Civic Center to enjoy these (and many more) pieces and artists:

**The Invisible Forest Exhibition:** an exhibition of paintings by renowned indigenous Peruvian-Amazonian artists realised by London-based author and curator Patsy Craig.

**A performance by duet OLOX,** which combines Zarina Kopyrina’s ancient, traditional Siberian shamanic music with modern sounds.

**Oakland’s Vessel Gallery Exhibit:** featuring local Oakland artists, including a very special life-sized whale painting.

**A recycled-plastics sculptural installation** from artists Joel Dean Stockdill and Yustina Salnikova.

**Meta-bottles:** enormous bottles filled with bottles—from conceptual artist Richard James.

**The Planetary Dance:** a participants-welcome ritual dance to restore health and peace to the planet.
50 Faces at Marin MOCA:
Mosaics Reinvented

by Judith M. Wilson
Students at Scuola Mosaicisti del Friuli in Italy are reimagining the art of mosaics. Marin residents will have a chance to see their innovative creations firsthand in 50 Faces, an exhibit that opens at the Marin Museum of Contemporary Art (MarinMoca.org) on September 21. The show is comprised of 50 portraits, with likenesses of Steve Jobs, Carlos Santana and Robin Williams among them, giving it a Northern California connection. A local link with Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, a little-known area of northeast Italy, however, is what made its trip abroad possible.

The family of Lido Cantarutti, director of the Marin Italian Film Festival (www.italianfilm.com), now in its 43rd year, hails from Friuli. When he discovered that some natives of the region were working in the tech industry in San Jose and had formed a cultural club, he decided to visit in January 2018. He learned that the Italian school was seeking a venue in the United States to host a unique exhibit of mosaics. He offered to assist and contacted several museums, but they turned him down, and he became discouraged. As a result, when he made an appointment with Nancy Rehkopf, executive director of Marin MOCA, to pitch the idea, he wasn’t optimistic. “It was a rainy day, and I was down in the dumps,” he says. Rehkopf, though, had attended the film festival and knew who Cantarutti was, and when he gave her a 50 Faces catalog, she was enthusiastic. She quickly got approval from the museum’s board and began planning the exhibit’s U.S. premiere.

Rehkopf explains that MOCA is looking for ideas to appeal to a younger generation as part of its Millennial strategy, and 50 Faces meets that need. “What’s on display is this incredible technique,” she says, and yet people will instantly know what they’re seeing. “Because we’re a museum, we try to have an education component in all our shows,” she adds, and in tandem with the exhibit, Denise Toson and Debora Franco, Italian artists who graduated from the Scuola Mosaicisti and have works in the collection, will come to Marin County as artists-in-residence. “They’re going to be ambassadors for mosaic art,” says Rehkopf. They will conduct a sold-out two-day workshop in color theory and creativity in contemporary mosaics at the Novato museum, and they will also share their expertise with students at local schools, including Marin School of the Arts and Dominican University.

New Mosaic for Canal Alliance Building

In addition, the Italian artists will create a mosaic for installation in the education building at
part of the local art network. “I wanted to continue bringing art to the other buildings,” says Carrera, and devoting an art installation to a Latino leader, Dr. Resa, became part of MOCA’s education program for 50 Faces. “It’s an intentional piece of art,” says Carrera. “We decided to recognize someone who has worked hard his whole life and is doing amazing work.” Learn more about Dr. Resa in the recent documentary film, “Ramón Rising.” (www.ramonrising.film/)

In addition to Storek, artists Guillermo Kelley and Tracy Eastman are involved. They will invite students who love art and are in Canal Alliance’s afternoon program to join them, giving them a mini project that’s part of the larger project. “Artists

Canal Alliance in San Rafael. It will feature a portrait of a living Latino hero, Dr. Ramón Resa, and will be surrounded by other paintings. Rehkopf points out that Canal Alliance (canalalliance.org) already has a track record in generating art, and the new project is meant to be inspirational.

Omar Carrera, Canal Alliance’s chief executive officer, explains that the mural You Are Home was installed in their office building on Larkspur Street earlier this year. It was a collaboration of ten local artists. Marin Open Studios and Storek Studios and Architecture were sponsors, and it was on this year’s Marin Open Studios tour. Thus, Canal Alliance became

“Bringing together a diverse group of people and creating a masterpiece is inspiration in itself.”

– Omar Carrera
Canal Alliance’s chief executive officer

Yayoi Kusama by Kseniya Khalyavko
are very individual thinkers,” says Carrera. “Bringing together a diverse group of people and creating a masterpiece is inspiration in itself.” The artists will create the mosaic in a classroom at MOCA, and members of the public will be able to watch them work. Architect and artist Rich Storek is the project designer.

50 Faces opens on Sat., September 21, and a celebration will take place from 5 to 8 p.m. on Marin MOCA’s front lawn. It will include music, food trucks, and chalk painting for kids—another Italian art form. The curator and artists will be on hand. “Everybody is invited, and it’s free,” says Rehkopf. “We have a group of about 10 docents who will give free tours.”

As opening day approaches, Cantarutti is getting excited. He describes 50 Faces as a beautiful, high-quality, world-class art collection and says, “This exhibit is going to be gorgeous.”

People have migrated from one part of the world to another throughout humanity’s history, and they once did it more freely than they do currently. Now, laws and opposing points of view make immigration a complex and divisive topic, and finding common ground is a difficult task. Book Passage in Corte Madera (www.bookpassage.com) is taking on the challenge with Immigration in America: the Law, the Politics, the Reality, an event on Sunday, September 22. Coordinator Paula Farmer, a freelance journalist and documentary filmmaker, hopes the panel discussion will elevate the conversation and increase understanding about the challenges that immigrants face.

Book Passage offered a similar event in February, Race in America: Where We Are & Where We’re Headed, and it focused on the current social and political climate with a view to the future. Farmer reports that the panelists were brilliant and engaged. The event was well received, and people asked if Book Passage could do more events on topical issues. “Talks like these are healing. They’re as much needed for the community as for Book Passage,” says Farmer. “I realized after the race panel that there are needs in the undocumented community. It [immigration] seemed like a natural thing to do.”

She started work in April on an event to spotlight immigration, give people information, and provide a way for community members to express their concerns and ask questions. She began seeking participants with a variety of perspectives, including literary, for the panel.

Jose Antonio Vargas

The first person who came to mind was Jose Antonio Vargas, who launched his hardcover book, Dear America, the Story of an Undocumented Citizen, at
Book Passage. Vargas came to the United States from the Philippines when he was 12 and was a member of the Washington Post team that won a Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of the Virginia Tech shooting in 2008. “Jose wasn’t a dreamer. He brings a unique perspective,” Farmer explains.

Vanessa Hua

Next came three more Bay Area residents. Vanessa Hua is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle who writes about Asian issues, and her first novel, A River of Stars: A Novel, is a story about motherhood and immigration that came out in 2018. She is the youngest member of the panel.

Carolina De Robertis

Carolina De Robertis, an award-winning novelist and creative-writing teacher at San Francisco State University, is the editor of Radical Hope: Letters of Love and Dissent in Dangerous Times, an anthology of essays related to the changing political atmosphere in America. Her parents are from Uruguay, and she is also knowledgeable about that country’s dictatorship. “It’s hard for her not to talk about the politics,” says Farmer.

Jaime Alcabes

The fourth member is Jaime Alcabes, a retired immigration lawyer, who will round out the conversation. “This topic needed a lawyer to come into the mix,” says Farmer.

As moderator, Farmer will ask questions to get the discussion started, and then the panelists will take it in whatever direction it leads. Each participant has his or her unique perspective. After about 45 minutes, members of the audience will have a chance to ask questions, and Farmer expects opposing points of view. She says, however, that while differing opinions are important, the conversation has to be respectful. “I don’t care if people in the audience disagree,” she says, but she wants them to listen and respect what others have to say and hopes they will consider the event an opportunity to learn from each other.

MarinArts (www.marinarts.org) which advocates for the arts in Marin County, and La Cocina (lacocinasf.org) a San Francisco-based food incubator that helps low-income entrepreneurs start businesses, are presenting Immigration in America in partnership with Book Passage. La Cocina works primarily with women of color and members of the immigrant community. Its cookbook, We are La Cocina, Recipes in Pursuit of the American Dream, will be available at the event. It contains 40 stories about women who have become self-sufficient and 120 recipes from cultures around the world. Farmer explains that when doing social platforms, it makes sense to help monetarily as well, so in addition to helping La Cocina market its book, Canal Alliance, which provides immigration services in Marin County, will be a beneficiary of fundraising at the event.

A diversity of cultures has the potential to make our communities richer, but immigration is a contentious issue, and the rhetoric tends to be heated. By offering an opportunity for organized, civil discussion, Book Passage is offering people the opportunity to consider other perspectives. And it couldn’t be more timely.

Book Passage

Immigration in America: Panel Discussion

The Law, the Politics, the Reality

September 15, 2019

Book Passage
Public art inspires and provokes:
San Rafael’s Utility Box Art Project &
Mill Valley’s PaintBox Project

by Kate Fitzsimmons
The importance of public art is the visible role it plays, for the community and the creative artists. The energy is reciprocal, whether you are lucky enough to see an artist’s creative process in action or you feel joy upon discovering a work of art in an unexpected place, like a city-owned utility box.

Yuan Chen, whose artwork graces a utility box along Third Street near Lincoln in San Rafael, explained, “People walking by really appreciated what I was doing and that gave me energy and productivity. I adopted the colors from Sol Food and the mural sunflowers on the freeway columns on Third. San Rafael has been wonderful, and they are embracing art. I call my piece ‘Turn the Season.’ We are in a dark season. My work is an attempt to brighten through color and bring hope.”

When the San Rafael Chamber of Commerce Leadership Institute Class chose utility box art as their capstone project, it didn’t hurt that three class members included city employees: Lindsay Lara (City Clerk), Lauren Monson (City Attorney), and Talia Smith (Public Works).

Another key element was San Rafael’s designation by the California Arts Council as California Cultural District. The Downtown San Rafael Arts District [www.artsanrafael.org] makes it possible for the dozens of non-profit arts organizations and art-related businesses downtown to make connections, create collaborative programming, and market together to promote the arts, and San Rafael as a premiere arts destination.

Class participant Catherine Layton (Eckhoff & Company) said, “We chose a project to add color and vibrancy to the downtown area. The class pitched in to raise money and employers made matching donations. The artists brought such wonderful energy to the project. I hope this will be the proof needed for the city to do more of this.” The Leadership class raised enough to cover $750 for each artist, for a total of about $4,500.

The Institute’s longtime chair, Cecilia Zamora said, “The city had attempted to do the utility box project years ago but lacked staff and funding to devote to the project. Utility box art was chosen by this class, and through the Leadership Institute, the combination of enthusiastic public, private, and non-profit professionals and business leaders made deeper collaboration possible. We looked at what other cities had done and then created a tool kit for cities to use in the future.”

Andrea Henderson (Bank of Marin), another of the 28 class members, explained, “My role revolved around the artists. How to pick a theme, creating the artist packet, working with the panel choosing the artists and then assigning individuals to be a liaison with each chosen artist. This was truly a group effort.”

Different cities, different approaches

While public art enjoys support in many Marin communities, the process of making it happen is complicated. Both the cities
of San Rafael and Mill Valley embrace the creation of public art but keep public safety first and foremost. Each city took a different approach.

Thomas Wong, an engineer with the City of San Rafael, worked closely with Talia Smith to scope out the project, walking the sites, choosing the newest utility box cabinets, and assessing public safety concerns to ensure artists a safe working environment. He said, “That sometimes meant blocking off parking and ensuring we wouldn’t obstruct sidewalks.”

Jenny Rogers, the City of Mill Valley’s Director of Arts and Recreation, explained, “Mill Valley has a rich history of embracing the arts that we want to see continue. The Arts Commission advocates for the arts and advocated for this project. Based on public safety, they chose to use digital images in a wrap technique [often seen on buses, trucks, vans, and cars] through a company called ProWraps, Inc.”

The Mill Valley Arts Commission had fewer hands to lighten the work, with only four commissioners involved in the project. “Jenny and Sharon [Valentino] did the lion’s share of work on this,” said Commissioner Pamela Livingston. “And this is just one element of our city arts program. We actually started the PaintBox project prior to San Rafael, but due to a variety of differences, including access to the city-owned utility boxes, public safety concerns ranked high in Mill Valley.”

**Plein Air Painting**

Both approaches have their benefits. As a teenager, Eyan Higgins Jones created art outside using spray cans to enliven derelict buildings near his hometown in Wales, UK. Only later, did he realize, “you can...”
get paid for that” which led to art school. Now in San Rafael, Jones employs a technique merging the traditional with sprayed art. In his airbrush work he uses oil paints. He enjoyed the immediate feedback and conversations with passersby. He suggests, “If you appreciate what you see, tell people, share the experience.”

The kids painting the box near Laurel Dell Elementary School received lots of support from the older students walking home from Davidson Middle School. Suzanne Joyal, Visual Arts Director with Youth in Arts explained, “These elementary school kids spent the last two years working with architects focusing on the city’s 2040 plan, exploring what they want the city to look like in 2040. Working with our Visual Arts Specialist Kathy Bowman, they took their words and painted them — these kids live in the Canal area, so their big message is “be prepared for sea-level rise.”

Digital Wraps

Artist Kathleen Edwards in Mill Valley said, “Street painting gives more of a connection to community. Each method has its own possibilities. I can see the advantages to wraps. The wraps make it easy to replace a section if it is damaged, since the design is easily reprinted.

Bogi Pataki, whose artwork graces a box at the Blithedale, Camino Alto intersection said, “Painting outside in 100-degree weather would not have been much fun. I do love seeing art around anywhere. We need art and it helps with every other tool in life, to spark creativity.”

Spence Snyder, another of the seven Mill Valley artists, was prepared to paint his box, but in some ways, he was happy not to. “I am a street painter, so I know what it is like to be seen and share the process with the public.” Yet, he embraced the idea of a digital creation, so much so that his design was chosen to grace the cover of the 2019-20 Enjoy Mill Valley Guide.

All of the individuals involved in both projects hope the public shares in the joy art inspires.

Suzanne Joyal

Laurell Dell students and Cathy Bowman work on their box.
Flying High
Marin Symphony Pops Raises the Bar
by Lily O’Brien
Prepare to be dazzled. The Marin Symphony just hired Stuart Chafetz as their new principal pops conductor, and he is bringing something completely different to the two performances of the fall pops concert on September 14 and 15—Cirque de la Symphonie! Expect acrobats flying through the air as you listen to the Symphony play familiar light classics like “Les Toreadors” from Bizet’s Carmen, and “Ride of the Valkyries” from Wagner’s The Ring. What’s not to like?

Marin Symphony Executive Director Tod Brody said they are very excited about the expansion of the pops program. “We were looking for someone last year to help steer the effort to expand our pops programming,” said Brody. “And we found Stuart Chafetz living almost in our backyard, right around the corner from the Symphony office.”

Brody explained that Chafetz conducted one of their pops concerts last year, which featured the music of John Williams, and it was hugely successful. “It was spectacular,” said Brody. “The musicians loved working with Stuart and so did we. He knows that world so well—what works, and what audiences respond to.” So they decided to expand his role, and this year, in addition to their very popular annual Holiday Pops Concert, there will also be a fall pops concert, and a brand new spring pops concert.

Chafetz, an acclaimed conductor, works in both the pops and classical worlds and is known for his charisma on the podium. He is the principal pops conductor of the Columbus Symphony and is in demand with national and international orchestras. He has shared the stage with numerous top artists, including Chris Botti, Michael Bolton, Randy Newman, and Jefferson Starship.

“He’s a star in this world of orchestral pop conducting,” said Brody. “He is smart, well-spoken, enthusiastic, and very good with audiences. He has been an orchestral percussionist and timpanist for his whole life, and he relates to the orchestra super well. He’s also married to Ann Krinitsky, our Marin Symphony Youth Orchestra conductor, so as somebody whose pretty much already in our family turns out to be the perfect person!”

I chatted with Chafetz by telephone recently about his new position, and what we can expect this year.
Tell me about your new position as the principal pops conductor with the Marin Symphony.

I am so excited to be part of the Marin Symphony family. As principal pops conductor, it’s my job to figure out and present what I think would be a well-rounded, all-encompassing program for the audience. People who go to pops concerts are often not regular symphony goers. So my goal, and certainly the Symphony’s goal, is to bring people from the entire community in to see what the Symphony is all about and what it has to offer. I am just so thrilled to be able to add some pops excitement to the Symphony!

What can we expect at the upcoming concert with Cirque de la Symphonie?

Cirque de la Symphonie is a show that I have done several times with many different orchestras, and it is a wonderful opportunity for worlds to connect with each other. The visual aspects of the program are so wonderful—you have the beauty of silks, contortionists, strongmen, and jugglers. It’s a really great way to start my first season as the principal pops conductor.

My biggest kick is when I conduct, and the musicians are watching the performers. It’s just hilarious. It would be so easy to get lost while watching all these incredible feats of skill, but somehow, they manage to stay in the same place.

Did you choose the repertoire?

Cirque has several different shows, and I handpicked this program with Cirque de la Symphonie’s founder, Alexander Streltsov. I like this one because it includes light classics, and features the orchestra just as much as it features the performers. There are lots of surprises.
You are also a classical conductor. What do you like about doing pops concerts?

I enjoy the pops concerts because we get the entire community. When I was the resident conductor with the Milwaukee Symphony, I toured with them doing Shostakovich, Mahler, and Brahms, and was totally digging it. But when we did the pops concerts, I got to work with artists like Randy Newman.

I love the excitement of the audience being able to let their hair down and not have to worry about clapping in the wrong place. I want the audience to sing and dance and applaud when they see the artists in the sky, and to feel engaged—not intimidated.

Why do you think pops concerts are so popular?

Popular music resonates with the entire community. It's upbeat and fun, and I just love the fact that we can bring an entire family to a concert and everybody gets something out of it. First-timers may be hearing music they have known their whole lives—wonderful light classics that everybody is familiar with—but were never sure where it came from. When we hear a tune that resonates with us, there's nothing like it—it's magical. And on top of that, you have this visual element that is just spectacular.

“I love the excitement of the audience being able to let their hair down, and not have to worry about clapping in the wrong place. I want the audience to sing and dance and applaud when they see the artists in the sky, and to feel engaged—not intimidated.”

— Stuart Chafetz
Marin Symphony’s principal pops conductor

Tell me about the pops concert coming up in the spring.

It’s called the “Super Heroes Soundtrack” and it features wonderfully written musical film scores from the superheroes films like X-Men and Captain America. And of course, we salute the female superheroes with Wonder Woman. We also have the old school stuff like William Tell and Robin Hood, so everyone—parents and grandparents—can appreciate certain aspects of the program. We have a really good time and it’s a total blast for the audience.

It must be nice to get a gig in your own community.

I live in Terra Linda so it is a dream come true for me. I do a lot of guest conducting and jumping on planes, and I can’t wait to just be able to drive or walk to work. I just love the fact that I can get really good tomatoes at the farmers market, and 30 feet away, I can go to work!
This year’s Mill Valley Film Festival Mind the Gap program will feature the digitally remastered version of the 1981 film “Thousand Pieces of Gold” by Marin-based director Nancy Kelly. The film is adapted from Ruthanne Lum McCunn’s 1982 book about a young Chinese woman brought to the American West against her will during the California Gold Rush. Moving performances bring to life issues that are still contemporary in 2019: racism, immigration, sex trafficking, and forced marriage.

The first release of “Thousand Pieces of Gold” was successfully launched in over 25 markets, receiving high acclaim. But at that time the film didn’t lead to feature film directing offers for Kelly. So, like many other women in film, she redirected her career towards low or midrange budget projects while her male counterparts were handed big-budget movies. Then, because 35 mm technology was becoming obsolete, Kelly’s only feature film nearly slipped into oblivion.

But now there is hope for female directors, thanks to programs like Mind the Gap, the Mind the Gap Summit, the Mind the Gap Award, as well as industry research underscoring these issues. Since the 2015 launch of MVFF’s Mind the Gap program supporting women in film, MVFF has maintained a high
level of quality while increasing the number of women telling stories and directing films. In 2016, USC Annenberg School’s Inclusion Initiative led by Stacy Smith created the first comprehensive report for the film industry because, despite public awareness of the issues around the lack of diversity in Hollywood, the statistics weren’t moving in the right direction. These stagnant numbers originally inspired the launch of Mind the Gap.

Since 2018, Elton and her MVFF team have been working towards a goal of screening 50 percent women-directed films at the Festival by 2020. Last year, out of 204 films, MVFF41 showcased 45 percent of women directors throughout the 11-day festival. The program and its partners work to ensure that women and their work are supported.

The backstory of “Thousand Pieces of Gold” is just one example of how many talented female directors were overlooked in the film industry for decades. The number of women who have succeeded in the movie industry is astonishingly low. After 91 years of the Academy Awards, five women have been nominated for an Oscar in the Best Director category, and only ONE woman has won in this category. For decades, the careers of women in film have stalled out.

“I didn’t realize until they started to do studies about the position of women in the industry, that everything was against me. It was only this year that I realized that I was one of those women,” comments Nancy Kelly.

While these film industry numbers are staggering, they are not much different from other male-dominated business categories. The 2019 list of Fortune 500 CEOs only included 33 women. According to the Silicon Valley Bank’s Women in Technology Leadership 2019 Report, only 5 percent of venture-funded businesses in the Valley have women in the role of CEO.

Mind the Gap Summit: Money

In addition to films screened, the MVFF Mind the Gap Summit takes place on Saturday, October 5, with the theme of money. This year’s Summit will honor an industry vanguard who has been pushing gender equity in filmmaking. Anna Serner, CEO of The Swedish Film Institute, will be the keynote speaker and present the findings of her research report entitled “The Money Issue.”

“We’re using this as a topic because money is financing,
money is power, and money is gender equity,” comments Elton.

Elton also believes it’s essential that filmmaking is gender-balanced. “Film influences all of our lives through storytelling. It’s so embedded into our lives as we look to films for inspiration, and role models for who we are and how we are on the planet.

The Summit isn’t just for filmmakers. All attendees, especially those trying to break through a glass ceiling in their own industry, can benefit from the shared wisdom. For example, Elton’s advice to young female directors is valuable to share with all young adults.

“Be confident in who you are. Never sell yourself short,” Elton encourages. “Be able to express your vision. Look for mentors, and don’t be shy to ask for help. Bring others up with you. Network like crazy. Trust your instincts about the people you meet.”

The Summit also will offer valuable tips to filmmakers with a how-to presentation from Pixar as well as a panel of directors sharing firsthand knowledge. Break out groups will make the networking more meaningful.

All Summit attendees will be rubbing shoulders with noteworthy female filmmakers from companies such as Let it Ripple Film Studio, The Representation Project, Based On Media, Finish Line Features, and Kali Films. The list of partners is a who’s who of organizations that support women in film, including 5050x2020, Film Fatales, Camp Reel Stories, Cinefemem, Reframe Rise, SEED & SPARK, USC Annenberg Inclusive Initiative, and Women and Hollywood.

“A Thousand Pieces of Gold” and Nancy Kelly

MVFF42 Festival attendees will be dazzled by “Thousand Pieces of Gold” on the big screen in a more beautiful than ever restored 4k digital version, thanks to the vision of Sandra Schulberg and IndieCollect. IndieCollect protects and preserves great American independent film from extinction as film technology becomes obsolete.

“Way ahead of its time, ‘Thousand Pieces of Gold’ resonates even more powerfully today in the era of #MeToo,” comments Sandra Schulberg. “But Nancy Kelly became a victim of prejudice against women directors within the American film industry and was never offered another movie to direct in spite of extraordinary reviews from critics, some of whom compared her talent to that of John Ford.”

After years as an acclaimed documentarian, Kelly is rebooting her feature film career. This time she will have the support of Mind the Gap and its partners, along with the title wave of change in public opinion in the age of #MeToo. The timing of the MVFF screening couldn’t be better for this local filmmaker. Her renewed optimism has inspired a second screenplay, which is currently titled “When We Were Cowgirls.”

“I would encourage people to ‘staycation’ in Marin to attend the Festival and the Summit,” Elton says. “It’s like having the Sundance Film Festival in your backyard.”

MVFF42
Oct 3-13
www.mvff.com
Although the Milley Awards have been around for more than 30 years, many people (including myself), never really knew quite what they were. Who gets a Milley Award? Do you have to live in Mill Valley to get one? Who picks the winners, and what do they actually get? I decided to investigate and find the answers to these pressing questions and solve this mystery once and for all.

I discovered that the original award was given in 1987 when Mill Valley Arts Commissioner Abby Wasserman had the idea to create an award to honor a local recipient for a lifetime of achievements in the arts. In 1988, the first award went to Ann O’Hanlon, founder of the O’Hanlon Center for the Arts. After several years, in 1994, Wasserman got together with several other members of the Arts Commission, including Trubee Schock, and the Milleys were born.

Every year, the executive committee for the Milleys asks for nominations from the community. Nominees must have been born, educated, worked, lived in, or made a significant contribution to Mill Valley. The winners are selected by a panel of judges, and nominees who don’t win one year are eligible to win in another one.

Both Wasserman and Schock retired this year, but fortunately, several people stepped forward to carry on the tradition. One of them was Amy Torrano. She was already serving on the Arts Commission as liaison to the Milleys; now she is co-chairing that committee along with Christian Mills. I chatted with her by telephone, and asked her why she believes the Milley Awards are so important.

“It’s a way to honor the community. It’s just so important to have artists and creatives in Mill Valley be represented,” said Torrano. “I grew up in Marin County, but I had no idea that right in our community we have true artists—not just famous people like Bob Weir or Sammy Hagar—but people who I have never even heard of, including some of the honorees this year. Thirty-one years is a long time to have an award to honor people for their talent, and I think it’s a great thing.”

The 2019 recipients will each receive the traditional bronze statuette on an engraved pedestal at the Awards Dinner on Sunday, October 20, hosted by local TV broadcast personality Don Sanchez, at the Mill Valley Community Center. Kind of like the Oscars! I asked this year’s winners to tell me about their reactions to winning a Milley. Their responses are below.

**Karen Benke**
Literary Arts

I was surprised and honored to find out that I’d received a Milley. I’ve lived in Mill Valley since 1993, working as a teaching artist with Poets in the Schools, raising my now college-aged son, and writing books. Working in the arts, I feel fortunate to
still call Mill Valley “home.” This acknowledgment feels like a nod of recognition for my off-the-beaten-path career choice of poet/writer/teaching artist. Receiving a Milley feels celebratory—I’m happy, honored, and shyly excited to meet my fellow recipients at the awards dinner on October 20th.

Robert Burton
Contribution to the Arts Community

I am honored and pleased to be receiving this coveted award, but for me, it’s also very bittersweet. My daughter had nominated both my wife, Elza and me (as a pair) for this award four years ago since many of our contributions to the arts over our more than 50 years in Mill Valley were done together. Unfortunately, Elza died last July, but I know how pleased and honored she would have been if she had survived. I think the Milleys are absolutely wonderful. They represent a lot of what Mill Valley stands for, and they emphasize the importance of the arts in our lives, which seems more important and relevant than ever, today.

Robert Holmes
Visual Arts and Design

Receiving any award is exciting but being honored with a Milley is particularly rewarding. I’ve won many awards during my career but I can honestly say the Milley was the biggest surprise, the most emotionally exciting and the greatest honor. I have lived over half my life in Mill Valley, and I have an inevitably strong attachment to the community. I am ecstatic to be selected to represent the visual arts in a city that is bursting with world-class talent. The timing is especially poignant in the present political climate, with so little support for the arts in general. Mill Valley should be proud to annually support those of us attempting to share our vision with the world and make it a more compassionate place.

Phil Pastuhov
Performing and Film Arts

It did come as a surprise to me this year—a very pleasant one. It’s surprising how many people have congratulated me on my Milley. I didn’t realize it was quite as well known an award as it is. In a relatively small community like Mill Valley, it’s important for our neighbors to realize that we have some pretty interesting people living here. I’ve been a cameraman for major motion pictures now for nearly 40 years, and I’ve been very privileged and honored to work with some of the best people in the industry. It’s always nice to be recognized in your hometown for what you do.
I have heard about the Milley Awards over the past few years and always thought it was a nice acknowledgment to those of diverse creative endeavors who made a career out of their passion. Last year I was invited to perform in a tribute for a Milley winner, the late Marty Balin (Jefferson Airplane). I feel quite honored and humbled that I now will be included in this appreciation of the arts, which for me is a lifelong career in music. I’ve loved Marin County and especially Mill Valley as my home since I moved west at 18 from my New England upbringing. The natural beauty of Mt. Tam and the grand Pacific Ocean is still full of inspiration for me!

“I’m a way to honor the community. It’s just so important to have artists and creatives in Mill Valley be represented.”

— Amy Torrano
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