

COMMUNITY

BLOGGER SPOTLIGHT 2 | IN THE GARDEN 3 | STEPPING OUT 4

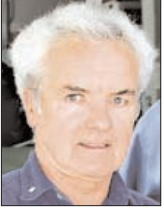
SECTION
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ARGUS-COURIER

THURSDAY,
JUNE 4, 2009

the Buzz

Remembering John Strong: An estimated 300 family members and friends gathered at the Petaluma Community Center on May 31 for a community-wide tribute and celebration of the life of Petaluma humanitarian **John Gilbert Strong**, who died on April 25 from Parkinson's disease. "He was a man who lived his spirituality, his religion," said longtime friend **Pastor Paul Brown**, who presided over the service. "For me, John understood, for your beliefs to mean anything, they have to make a difference. And John made a difference. He might have been a little scrapper, but he was the big dog in the community. In his metalwork, in his care for this community and in his Rotary projects around the world, he made a difference." Rep. **Lynn Woolsey**, D-Petaluma, also spoke and noted that her comments about Strong would be read into the Congressional Record. Donations in Strong's memory may be made to The Parkinson's Institute, 675 Almanor Ave., Sunnyvale 94085, or to the Petaluma Valley Rotary Club Trust Fund, P.O. Box 2101, Petaluma 94953 for Scholarships for Underprivileged Children.



Strong

What's cookin': **Laurie Figone** of Petaluma forgot all about entering a contest in "Taste of Home" magazine until she opened up the June/July issue to find the recipe she sent staring back at her. "I entered my recipe last December in a 'made with tomato' cooking contest," she said. "My recipe for tomato and brie focaccia bread was a runner-up!" For more information, visit www.tasteofhome.com.

We have another winner: Petaluma author **Mark Taylor's** new book "Hiking the Trail of Truth," won third place in the category of Christian Living in the Christian Choice Book Awards for spring 2009. His book examines issues of faith, science and the Christian walk. Go online to www.xulonpress.com/awards_contest/spring/winners.html for the full scoop.

Dyed-in-the-wool fan: **Sumner Fowler**, a freelance photographer who provides many sports photos to the Argus-Courier, is a dedicated Casa Grande High School sports fan. Fowler is well known for generously providing photos of all Gaucho sports to the athletes and their families, as well as making collages for awards dinners and the like. He took his enthusiasm to a new level for the North Coast Section baseball playoffs, dying his ample beard green to reflect the Gauchos' green and gold school colors.

Rummaging for a good cause: If you love a good rummage sale, but also like being able to help the needy, you are in luck. Petaluman **Lynn Moquete** is organizing a rummage sale to benefit the young people of the Dominican Republic. It will be held from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, June 13 at Living Faith Church, 830 Petaluma Blvd. North (behind Stinger Sportswear). In addition to a host of items up for sale, there will be free hot dogs, water and live music by **Matt Norman** and his band. Everything still left at the sale after 3 p.m. will be free. The event is to raise money for a scholarship fund. In addition, donations of arts and crafts items are needed for projects in the Dominican Republic. Items needed include: Luggage with wheels and carry-ons to put arts and crafts supplies in, lots of ballpoint pens, green floral tape, artificial flowers of any kind, lanyard, keyrings, coloring books, crayons/markers, Burger King crowns, stickers, yarn, beads of any kind, string, fishing wire and macramé string.

Got an item for The Buzz? E-mail it to argus@arguscourier.com. Put "The Buzz" in the subject line.

HOW TO REACH US

News releases for the Community section may be e-mailed to yovanna.bieberich@arguscourier.com.
 ■ Deadline is at least two weeks prior to the event.
 ■ Press releases should be typed and must include date, time, place and a telephone contact.
 ■ For more information, call Yovanna Bieberich, 776-8461.



TERRY HANKINS/ARGUS-COURIER STAFF

Miguel Lom Elliott leads workshops on how to build with cob, which is a material similar to adobe. He builds ovens, benches and other small structures. The easiest way to make cob, a mixture of sand, clay and straw, is by footpower.

Using natural resources

Miguel Lom Elliott introduces others to cob, a mixture of clay, sand and straw, as a natural building material

By **YOVANNA BIEBERICH**
ARGUS-COURIER STAFF

Petaluma sculptor Miguel Lom Elliott works with a medium that many people may not be familiar with. In fact, mention cob structures to some and they might be thinking of corn.

Similar to adobe, cob is a building material that's been around for centuries and is a mixture of sand, clay and straw that can be sculpted and dried in the sun. Cob can be used to build all sorts of structures, from homes and benches to ovens and art. It differs from adobe in that it is not made into bricks.

Elliott first discovered cob while working with students at an alterna-

tive high school in Eureka. He quickly discovered a love for the medium.

"I had heard about cob and had seen a video about building with the earth," said Elliott. "I showed that to the kids and said, 'let's build.' We dug a hole, got the clay, sand and straw and started stomping on it and doing our little mud dance. We built a bench and it turned out to be a fun, sculptural thing. I thought, 'This stuff is amazing!'"

He spent the next 10 years building cob structures in Argentina, Guatemala and Thailand, where he built homes in the wake of the devastating 2004 tsunami.

"My biggest job was building a Waldorf school down in Argentina,

where I lived for a year," said Elliott. "That's when I really got into the creative aspect of sculpturing and began to see myself as a sculptor."

After returning to the United States, Elliott went to Chicago, where he built a nightclub completely out of cob — the biggest earthen sculpture in the world at 1,200 square feet. The nightclub took 10 months to build.

"Now I'm back in my hometown of Petaluma," said Elliott. "The clay here is so good that it's such a thrill to work in Petaluma. I'm back to my roots in adobe."

Today, Elliott builds earthen ovens, benches, saunas, sculptures and a host of other cob structures

COB WORKSHOP

What: Miguel Lom Elliott leads a two-day workshop on building a cob oven and bench.
When: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. June 20-21
Where: Petaluma Bounty Farm, 55 Shasta Ave.
Cost: \$55 per day
Information: 320-3609 or www.livingearthstructures.com

for local clients. He also offers workshops in which he teaches others the benefits of cob as well as how to build with it.

"This is such an amazing building material," said Elliott. "Overall, I would say the number one benefit of cob as a building material is the whole process of mixing it up with your feet and adding straw. It just feels right — this is how we're supposed to build. Secondly, I would say cob is great for environmental reasons. It doesn't require cement, doesn't create pollution and there's an abundance of this material right under our feet. I feel like the richest man in the world. I have a stack of 150 adobe bricks and they were free to make. They didn't cost me a thing, and they are so useful."

Elliott added that building a cob structure is a great community project. It not only helps the structure to be completed quicker; it also brings people together as well as educates and inspires.

"Cob is flexible and very durable," he said. "It's also weather-proof once it is plastered and sealed. Cob is also cheap and affordable. People without a lot of money can build with it."

Locals will have the opportunity to learn how to make and use cob at a workshop to be held June 20-21 at the Petaluma Bounty Farm on Shasta Avenue. The focus of the workshop will be on building an oven and bench for the farm.

"These earthen ovens get hot enough to cook pizza in just three minutes," said Elliott. "And they taste so much better. There's just something about the clay. The other great thing about these cob ovens is they provide an outdoor fireplace. It gives people the opportunity to enjoy their back yard more instead of sitting in front of the TV."

The cost of the workshop is \$55 per day. To register, contact Elliott at 320-3609 or visit his Web site at www.livingearthstructures.com.

(Contact Yovanna Bieberich at yovanna.bieberich@arguscourier.com)

TOOLIN' AROUND TOWN

Dorothy Henning's roots were in Lake District

As a child growing up in the Lake District in the southernmost corner of Sonoma County, Dorothy Henning learned that rural communities are often more close-knit than neighborhoods in town where houses sometimes seem to overlap each other.



HARLAN OSBORNE

There may have been some distance between ranch houses, but the closeness and comfort derived at school, neighborhood social clubs and a 12-party telephone line provided long-lasting bonds of friendship that have never faded away.

"Our neighbors were always great friends with each other. I've been quite fortunate to live out here," said Henning, 88, a nearly life-long resident of the area just beyond the Lakeville District where her grandparents purchased a 100-acre spread in 1903 for \$5,500.

Dorothy's grandfather, Andrew Donogh, first settled in San Francisco from Canada in 1876, but moved to Petaluma in 1880 to partner with Robert Woods in the express business. Widely respected and admired for his kindness, he was one of the first ranchers to locate in that region. He originally settled in Reclamation before purchasing the family property, which he operated as a dairy and chicken ranch, and he was one of the early members of the Petaluma Cooperative Creamery.

Dorothy's grandmother, the former Eliza Spotswood, also a descendant of a pioneer Petaluma family, was a strong believer in community unity and helped found the Lakeville Neighborhood Club, a women's social organization that met weekly to share information and hobnob about current events. She also helped create the Happy Go Lucky Club for neighborhood kids.

The Donoghs raised three children: A.J., who became a dentist in the East Bay; Hattie, who worked at Petaluma's Bank of America; and Russell, who took over the ranch in the late 1930s after his parents died.

Russell Donogh married Engre Kulberg, the daughter of Sarah and Andrew Kulberg, who was one of Sonoma County's leading orchardists in the late 1800s. Kulberg owned and cultivated his orchard in Cherry Valley on land purchased from the Blackburn estate that today is the site of Mary Collins at Cherry Valley Charter School.



Dorothy Henning, right, posed for this photo with her best friend, Frances Chamberlain, in the early 1930s.

Russell and Engre Donogh expanded the ranch by adding more cows and building a bunkhouse, and, in an effort to produce more hay, purchased 40 acres in east Petaluma. That property was later sold and became the Petaluma campus for Santa Rosa Junior College. The Donoghs' two children, Russell and Dorothy, enjoyed the agrarian lifestyle, but each one had different aspirations after graduating from University of California, Davis — Russell with a degree in agricultural science and Dorothy with a degree in home economics.

"My brother was going to take over the ranch, but he was killed in action during World War II in the Philippines and I never had any plans to stay in agriculture," said Dorothy. Instead, in 1942, she married career serviceman Eugene Henning, an aircraft mechanic stationed at Hamilton Field.

The Hennings lived in parts of the United States, Europe and Japan before returning to the ranch where they raised their six children: Eugene, Donna, Sally, Bruce, George and Jim. However, Dorothy's husband didn't adapt well to ranching and the couple divorced in the mid-1970s.

She stayed on the ranch, and with the help



TERRY HANKINS/ARGUS-COURIER STAFF

Dorothy Henning earned her teaching credential 10 years ago and teaches at the 4Cs pre-school.

from her family, kept it functioning. Her sons, Bruce and Jim, now raise beef cattle on the property and Russell operates a hay business known as the Hay Lady.

An inspiring and vibrant woman, Dorothy received her teaching credential about 10 years ago and has been teaching at the 4Cs pre-school. Despite some health issues, she also recently learned to play the guitar.

"You can't stop learning. I tell my kids no one can take an education away from you," she noted.

In conjunction with the Petaluma Historical Museum's current dairy exhibit, Dorothy Henning's long-time neighbor, rancher George Gambonini, will discuss his family's history of dairy ranching in the Lakeville District on June 14, at 3 p.m. at the museum.

(Harlan Osborne's column, Toolin' Around Town, appears every two weeks. Contact him at harlan@sonic.net)