

POINT REYES LIGHT

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BOLINAS > Mardi Gras parade pulled costumed locals out of their shells. /12



VALLEY > Craft collective in Forest Knolls features antiques and classy goods. /10



ARTS > Watercolor orchids by Bolinas artist will be on display at Fort Mason. /5



CALENDAR > Chinese new year will be celebrated all week at the Point Reyes Library. /20



A peloton of bicyclists pedalled past Tomales Bay Monday in the third annual Tour of California. The route crossed 40 miles of Highway One and ended in Santa Rosa. Photo by T. Yeatts

Preschool head resigns in face of silent board

by Justin Nobel

The Papermill Creek Children's Corner Board of Directors placed Executive Director Meg Frye on administrative leave on February 4. Two days later, Frye submitted her resignation to the board. Parents were notified in a letter from head teacher Nadine Varley, now the acting executive director. Some parents were happy to see Frye gone—at times she had clashed with popular teachers. Others were outraged and wondered why the woman who had helped secure much needed funding was all of a sudden ousted. Most people are confused and

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Less ice, late grey whales

by Justin Nobel

Arctic sea ice covered an area 40 percent smaller than the long-term average last year, a change that has likely affected the southbound migration of grey whales.

Last Saturday, visitors at the Point Reyes Lighthouse spotted three whales traveling north. Grey whales typically pass Point Reyes from late December through early February, during their massive migration from the frigid waters off

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HABLANDO /4

How and for whom the Latinos voted and why

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Lance Leonard Brown, 1947-2008

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Our children learned to swim at shell beach

A literary angle on art

by Jacoba Charles

An arching tangle of willow guides you into a small room. The sound of falling water intersects with textures of leaf, flower, river and forest. A series of sculptures, made from natural objects such as kelp, stone and the slim boughs of native trees, are presented against blank walls, tracing delicate shadows on the floor.

Almost a quarter of the room is filled with a pond built with rock, driftwood and bark chips. Water pours into it from a waterfall flowing down a screen, onto which digital nature photographs are projected. Nearby is a rough bench made from a thick, weathered plank.

This is a collaborative art installation, titled RePose, currently on display at Gallery Route One in Point Reyes Station. The interplay of sculpture, digital imagery and water is designed to incite contemplation of the human relationship with nature as the viewer wanders through.

The installation reflects on the legacy of Wallace Stegner, author and pioneering wilderness advocate. It is one of five art exhibits planned to coincide with the literary conference entitled "Geography of Hope: Celebrating Wallace Stegner" that will be held in town next month.

"Our intention was to create a space

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Extended Sheriff's call /3

>> A Forest Knolls woman lost her dream bike when burglars kept into an old dairy barn she rents on Tamal Road.

>> Preschool

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curious—why did this happen, what were the events leading to the decision, and what will happen to Papermill?

These questions have naturally been addressed to the board, but with little result. The board has been advised by their legal counsel that they can't discuss the issue. With no information forthcoming, Papermill has spawned a rumor mill. Parents held a meeting two Saturdays ago at the preschool to discuss questions for the board. At a meeting last week at West Marin School these questions were asked, but few were answered. The press was barred from the meeting.

"It is the first time I've had a taste of how powerful rumors can be in small community," said Natalie Loeper, a former Papermill teacher and parent. "I understand parents are feeling confused and concerned, and it's really easy to turn that into anger, and anger is being misdirected."

Rumor mill

In a letter addressed to Papermill staff, parents and community members, Frye explains that she has "become increasingly disturbed and disappointed by a number of the Board's actions. These actions have made it functionally impossible to perform my duties as the executive director."

According to the letter, the board is yet to approve the 2007-2008 budget, which Frye developed with several financial advisors.

Frye's letter also states: "the Board has taken apparently secret and potentially damaging action against me." The board told Frye that she needs to participate in an "investigation" concerning her conduct, but they have not yet told her the allegations, although she has been assured that they don't involve civil or criminal violations.

Frye says that the release of a statement saying she is under investigation "will have a substantial negative impact on my reputation in the community by implying that I have engaged in illegal, unethical or other reprehensible conduct."

"Obviously, in a community as small as Marin," she continues, "my reputation as an educator and administrator is of critical value to my ability to find another position and earn a living."

Not everyone stands behind Frye. Several parents have noted that more than one teacher has left citing conflicts with Frye as their reason. Since it is so difficult to find new teachers these losses sting, and some parents hold Frye accountable.

"It doesn't seem to me that the board is creating a problem," said Loeper. "When I was a teacher at Papermill the board didn't seem very active. The current board is addressing problems that have been accumulating over time."

Rumors around town have circulated that Frye's leave is related to some form of embezzlement. At this point, these statements are unfounded, and according to friends of Frye, these rumors have hurt her.

"Embezzlement is a pretty serious charge and one of the concerns right now is why has the board acted irresponsibly and allowed that rumor to go unchecked," said former board member Trish Callo. "At no time when I was on the board did anyone provide any concrete evidence of financial malfeasance, or even financial mismanagement."

Since June, six people have left the board; five resigned; and Callo, who served one two-year term, was voted off at an annual board meeting in November.

Frye helped inform Callo about child-care options when she first moved to the community and the two have maintained a strong friendship. Callo believes that she was voted off specifically because she disagreed with some of the actions the board took regarding Frye.

"I'm sure my actions were interpreted that my judgment was clouded," she said, "but I can honestly say that at no time did my friendship cloud my judgment."

"I had every intention of continuing on the board for another two years," added Callo. "It's a big responsibility, so when you step down it's not done lightly."

And it's a responsibility that despite the challenges, parents and community members commit to because they believe in the school.

"The level of preschool at Papermill is tremendous," said Callo, "it is absolutely tremendous."

But nevertheless, answers involving the present situation are needed.

"The one thing that seems to float to the top of all this," said Callo, "is there seems to be a lack of information flowing from the current board and it would be really, really great to have that."

The *Light* spoke with Papermill board director Lila Purinton, but most questions received an amiable but steadfast stonewall.

"Why did the board decide to put Executive Director Meg Frye on administrative leave?"

"No comment."

"When exactly was Executive Director Meg Frye placed on administrative leave?"

"No Comment."

"I understand that there are legal reasons for the board's silence. Could you perhaps explain to me why the board can not comment on some of these issues?"

A brief pause, followed by "no comment," at which point this *Light* reporter felt an odd connection to the raindrops outside, which thudded on the roof of the Creamery Building.

"I'm sorry, I know this must be frustrating for you," Purinton explained.

"What I can say," she added, "is the children are happy at Papermill. They are doing just fine. Nothing has changed in terms of what the children experience at

Papermill when they're dropped off."

Papermill

Papermill Creek is a nonprofit child-care center in downtown Point Reyes Station that was founded nineteen years ago. Preschool is provided for kids ages one-and-a-half and up, and kindergarteners and first graders arrive by bus from West Marin School for after-school programs. Younger kids are broken into groups of toddlers, ages one-and-a-half to three, and preschoolers, ages three to five. Specialized programs help children prepare for kindergarten with free summer classes and aid needy parents and kids.

Though the school provides one of the only forms of organized early childhood care in Point Reyes and is well loved by many parents, it has also been plagued with problems in recent years. A series of unexplained vandalisms in 2001 was repeated in 2005. Teachers are beset with low pay and the high cost of West Marin living; they rotate frequently. The school has had four executive directors in the past ten years.

Papermill has its historical roots in a parent's cooperative preschool, explained Rhonda Kutter. As a Papermill parent Kutter helped create a position to organize parent volunteers. Parents can fill their volunteer hours by gardening, cleaning, setting up for the yearly carnival fundraiser or by becoming a member of the nine person Board of Directors, which typically consists of six Papermill parents and three community members.

The unpaid board position includes monthly meetings that focus on pressing staff and parent issues, accounting, and decisions regarding the hiring and firing of the executive director, whose main role is to help secure funding for the school and oversee programming.

The job of the board this past week has been particularly challenging, as they have explained to information-hungry staff, parents, community members and press that they simply can't talk about the decision they made regarding Executive Director Meg Frye.

"I, like many parents, am frustrated that the board can't give us the answers we want right now," said Kutter. "I'm just hopeful that there will be a positive resolution soon."

"It's hard to level criticism at the board when supervising the school is the responsibility of all Papermill parents," explained Kutter. "I could have joined the board," she said, "but I didn't. I think we all share in the responsibility that things could have been monitored more closely."

Confusion mill

Meg Frye joined Papermill in 2002. She replaced Joel Gilbert, who was executive director for two years. "Joel feels he has taken the new developments at the school as far as he can take them, and feels a new director with a different set of skills best serves the school," explained former board president Julie Cassel in a

letter to the *Light*. In the same letter, she introduces Frye: "Meg had been a summer resident for over 30 years, returning to live in West Marin fulltime two years ago. Meg became familiar with Papermill last year when her daughter, Alex, participated in the after school program. Meg brings more than 12-years experience in management administration with her, and is firmly committed to continuing Joel's vision and adding her own passion for serving the families of West Marin."

Frye was a good candidate for the job because she previous financial experience.

"For the last five years Papermill's programs have been taken to a higher level than they ever have been before," said Dave Whitney, a former Board Member who left in September of 2007. New programs include more music and art in the classroom, field trips and better computer technology. "Meg has improved the situation," he said.

Frye helped reign in money for the entire Shoreline School District provided for by a 1998 state bill called the California Children and Families First Act, widely known as Proposition 10. The bill levies a 50-cent per pack tax on cigarettes to fund early childhood development programs.

First 5 Marin is an organization established by the Marin County Board of Supervisors in 1998 to allocate and coordinate programs made possible by monies levied through Proposition 10. Educators noticed the positive effects of a program in San Rafael called Canal School Readiness, which provides services for young kids and families in that area.

Wanting to provide similar services for West Marin, Frye applied for a grant from First 5 as part of a collaborative committee that also included members of the Dance Palace, the Coastal Health Alliance and local parents.

The result was the creation of Shoreline School Readiness (SSR) in 2004, an organization located in downtown Point Reyes Station which is dedicated to making sure Shoreline kids and families are ready for the challenges of school. SSR has other funding sources, including the United Way, but First 5 is the main one.

The Shoreline district runs from Bodega Bay to Stinson and the money from First 5, \$125,000 per year, applies to the entire area. First 5 likes their grants to be administered by local agents; for this grant Papermill was the fiscal agent and Frye was the supervisor of the grant, explained Dana Pepp of First 5. Because Papermill supervises the grant, they receive a ten percent "hosting fee," which is intended to go towards programming.

Frye, along with everyone else on the committee, was very passionate about supporting young children and families, said Pepp.

But on December 5 of last year, Frye was relieved of her role as supervisor of the First 5 grant.

"As of December 5, 2007, Papermill remained the fiscal agent for Shoreline but Meg was no longer the project super-

Ask Missy



I know a lot of you think I harken back to the Old Days—but there are good reasons.

By Now, I'm sure Everyone knows that our Governor has decided to close down Tomales Bay State Park – somewhere around June. This Park—to residents—is considered The West Marin Jewel. Most of us feel Helpless—Is there Anything We can do—? What, How?

I've only lived in West Marin for 49 years. I know some my age & older that learned to swim at Shell Beach, and whose Parents Bought the Land that Shell I & II occupy so that those two beaches would be there and Available for their Grandchildren and now Gret-Grandchildren. So when the State acquired the property to develop Tomales Bay State Park, the Good Citizens of Inverness gave Their Property To The State. So does that mean that the state will Close Down Shell's I & II and the path to it?

Show me a kid—raised in Inverness—and some in Pt. Reyes, who looks back on the Swimming Lessons, sponsored by the (then) Inverness Improvement Association, as one of the best experiences of their summers. Mothers and kids arrived at 9 AM – built a fire in a big Steel Drum so when the oldest senior swimmers finished their half hour with their teeth chattering and blue lips they huddled around the fire wrapped in towels and drinking the Hot Cocoa every Mother brought. While some Mothers served the Cocoa, the rest counted the Children in each class—never lost a single one.

Learning to swim in Tomales Bay was Very Important to any child planning to ride in a boat—go fishing—learn to sail—just horse around. Some Locals went to Rancho Nicasio's Pool—Heated Pool—not much of a preparation to falling into Cold—Salty and in some cases Muddy Tomales Bay. That kind of experience leads to Perseverance— Character—Community—that lasts into Adulthood.

Times changed. Mothers went to work—and Maidee Moore started Waterdogs to raise money and to hire Teachers and now someone—probably sitting high above everyone, keeping track of them—will guide the “State Police” who come to protect the land from us, keeping our Children and Grandchildren off the Beaches they love. Some of my Washington State Grandchildren—mostly now Adults—head for Shell the minute they arrive in West Marin—regardless of time of year and weather.

And how about, Heart's Desire—almost Everyones favorite Picnic spot—Isn't there something that can change Arnold's mind?

Call Missy at 663.8404 or send a letter to
Box 210, Pt. Reyes, 94956

visor,” explained Pepp, who is the new project supervisor.

No one could answer whether or not the reasons behind the decision of First 5 and Shoreline School Readiness to relieve Frye of her role as supervisor were linked to the decision by Papermill's board three months later to put her on administrative leave.

Smile mill

Historically, preschools are nonprofit, explained *Jeanne W. Lepper, director of Stanford University's Bing Nursery School and a lecturer in Stanford's Department of Psychology, but they are typically affiliated with existent organizations, such as synagogues and churches or generously-endowed universities.*

“Unless there is some base of funding, it is very difficult to maintain a good preschool program,” said Lepper. “It's labor intensive. It's not just one teacher for 20 kids, you need two or three people for 20 children.”

Running a good preschool comes down to two things, said Lepper: funding and good teachers. Acquiring either can be difficult.

“In terms of human relations, I think it can be very tricky,” she added. “People care very much about young children and the younger the children are, the more they care.”

Just after 3 p.m. on Tuesday a group of young children, kindergarteners and first graders fresh from a day of schooling at West Marin School, were dropped off at Papermill for after-school care.

“Everyone have inside voices please,” explained a teacher who ushered the children into the school and out of the drizzle.

Purple raincoats were hung on hooks

and sky blue galoshes squeaked on the floor.

“Say excuse me,” said the teacher, to a girl in pink trying to hang her jacket where this *Light* reporter was standing.

“Excuse me,” said the girl, smiling with humble gusto.

“Papermill is part of the whole fabric of this community,” Purinton explained to me later that day. “Childcare, health-care, resources for the elderly, all of these are issues that keep a community vibrant. The community is like a woven piece of fabric and it is just incredibly important for them to all be intact.”

“It's a fabulous school,” she added. “I wouldn't have joined the board if I didn't think it was great for the community. My daughter went to preschool at Papermill. She's 16 now. She has great memories.”

For some Papermill graduates those memories burn so strongly that they are moved to stand up for their school years later. Former Papermill student Jenna White, who now lives in Kamuela, Hawaii, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Light* on August 26, 2004 about a string of unexplained vandalisms.

“I still remember a lot of things about [Papermill],” wrote White. “My wonderful caregivers, who were so dedicated to making children's lives happy and healthy, are some of the best people I know. They have worked so hard for that beautiful little preschool, and it breaks my heart to think of people setting fire to the structures I once played on...”

“The community of West Marin was the best place I could ask for to grow up in,” said White near the end of her letter. “But with this and other recent stories, I have to wonder, what's happening to it now?”



Chris Giacomini, owner of Toby's Feed Barn, sits in a bench in the community garden in Point Reyes Station. Photo by Scout De Natale.