

Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society Historian

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President's Message

"To me, old age is always fifteen years older than I am."—Bernard Baruch

I recently received a birthday card that included this sentiment. I laughed, whole-heartedly agreeing, and opened the card to see the wish, "may your spirit stay forever young." Indeed, it is the delight with the new, the recently discovered and the laughter that bubbles up, often with little prompting, that that percolates the essence of youth even as we acquire more candles on our cake.

On May 7, the KGHS is partnering with the Bon Air Center to celebrate its' 70th birthday. While not a Marin native, I have shopped and socialized at Bon Air Center for almost 35 years and have seen transitions and renovations, continuing to nurture a welcoming, community-friendly spot to meet neighbors and friends. As a member of KGHS, I have become even more aware of the impact the Bon Air Center and the Schultz family had on developing the community of Greenbrae, from its beginnings in the early 1950s to the present day.

Please join us on May 7 as we celebrate both the anniversary and the continuing commitment to our communities nestled in the heart of Marin. The celebration promises to be one heck of a birthday party!

Susan Morrow
Co-president, 2021-2022

KGHS and Bon Air Center are celebrating



**May History and Heritage Day and
Bon Air Center's 70th Anniversary!
Saturday, May 7th, 11am-2pm**

Enjoy a day of appreciation and commemoration beginning with a proclamation of *Bon Air Day* from the City of Larkspur and kicking off with center-wide participation and entertainment, including merchant specials, samples, trunk shows, treats and more.

- Live music by Bread & Roses
- A cornhole tournament Register [HERE](#) for the cornhole tournament.
- New wall mural showcasing the past, present and future of Bon Air created in partnership [Canal Arts](#).
- Celebrate over 30 Community organizations from across Marin
- Local fire trucks and vintage cars dating back to 1952 on display under the oak tree. ... **and much more!**

In Memory of Mary "Molly" Kent Schardt

Mary Kent Schardt -aka- Molly passed away quite unexpectedly on Saturday, March 12, 2022. Molly was born in 1936 in Kentfield, CA. She was the daughter of Roger Kent, chairman of the Northern California Democratic Party, and grand-daughter of William Kent, Congressman and creator of Muir Woods and Mt. Tamalpais State Park. She grew up in Kentfield, the Ojai Valley, and Washington DC. She went to Smith College for her bachelor's degree in botany and NYU for her masters in Asian art history. While in college, she met Max Schardt and they were married after a year-long, long-distance romance, in 1962.

Their two sons, Chris and Fred, were brought up in Kentfield, the locus of their family for five generations. Her contributions and stories of the Kent family history were key to the establishment of KGHS and the publication of *In the Heart of Marin: a History of Kentfield & Greenbrae*.



She was an avid potter, an Asian art historian, working at the Asian Art Museum for many years. She and Max were avid travelers in China, Japan, Nepal, Bhutan, and especially Tibet. Her husband Max passed in 2019. She will be missed.

Bon Air Center... A History

From In the Heart of Marin: A History of Kentfield and Greenbrae
By Dewey Livingston p. 269-275

A 32-acre site across from the residential areas of Greenbrae was originally planned for more residential development, but the Schultz Co. changed its mind and had the area rezoned from residential to commercial in 1948. On this combination of marshland and low ground, the Schultzes created a shopping center designed to serve the residents of not only Greenbrae but nearby towns along the 101 corridor.



Aerial view of Greenbrae

After initial site work that included filling about five acres of marshland with rock and dirt from toad building, The Schultz Co. released plans for the shopping center in early 1951, marking completion of a general plan for Greenbrae after careful consideration of the sites involved. Planned to be “one of the finest” shopping centers in the Bay Area, the commercial buildings would be designed with “a Marin type of architecture.” The center was initially designed by Gruen and Kummek, a Los Angeles architectural firm specializing in modern shopping centers, with the participation of nationally recognized land planner Seward Mott of Washington, DC. Buffered from Sir Francis Drake Boulevard by 1,500-2,000 car parking lot, the center would be accessed by a new road opposite the entrance to Greenbrae homes at La Questa Drive, where a traffic light had been recently installed. Plans included a grocery super market and six stores for a combined floor space of 20,000 square feet, all fronted by a covered sidewalk...

...Construction started on the super market in September of 1951. Niels Schultz Sr. asked James T. “Scotty” Kilpatrick to lease and manage the market, to be called Bon Air Super....

...Prominent architect Victor Gruen worked with Schultz and Kilpatrick to build “the most modern super market” of the time in a location across Sir Francis Drake Boulevard from the fast-growing community of Greenbrae. The 125,000 square foot market being built was considered “tremendous” at the time.

Bon Air Super opened on November 20, 1952 with a ceremony “rivaling a Hollywood premiere” that drew 5,000 people and featured searchlights, contests, and the debut of “mechanical check-out stands” that sped purchasing. Employees wore white uniforms, emblazoned on the back with “Bon Air SUPER” and garrison-type white caps. A lucky person won a whole dressed pig by guessing its weight. Kilpatrick sold 2,800 quarts of ice cream that day.



Bon Air Market Opening 1952

Kilpatrick and the Schultz family joined in the holiday spirit by providing support and a location for Boy Scout Troop 11's (later 59) Christmas tree lot next to the store in 1952. The Kentfield-Greenbrae Dad's Club loaned money to buy the trees for sale. The tree sales continued for many years, and remain today after more than 50 years operated by the Pronzini family. In 1953 an “Art in Action” exhibit at the Super brought artists and shoppers together, including demonstrations by students in weaving and ceramics....

...Kilpatrick's sons Jim and Jon joined the store staff as teenagers; as of 1959 the store employed 22 people. That year, the store advertised its modern features such as automatic doors that opened when a customer

stepped on the threshold, and aisles wide enough “to permit easy passage of two lanes of shopping cart traffic.”...

...Later the market moved east to a larger space in the center and eventually went out of business; the old supermarket building became David M. Brian. The Schultz Co. entertained an offer from a large chain for the empty store when Frank Petrini heard about the opportunity at Bon Air. Petrini, an Italian immigrant who had found success in operating meat markets in San Francisco, approached the Schultz Co. and convinced them that he could bring in plenty of business; in a short time after opening in 1964, he built up a popular full-service supermarket, used by people all over Marin, that grossed \$16 million. Petrini's served a new generation of Marinites for more than 30 years, and during that time grew into a highly successful regional chain. Mollie Stone's, opened in 1996, keeps up with the local demand today just as Jim Kilpatrick did over 60 years ago...



Inside Petrini's Market

Bon Air Super stood alone for almost three years, until five new shops in a low, modern building designed by Victor Gruen opened to its east in 1955. A hardware store, beauty salon, barber shop, laundry and dry cleaner, and liquor store opened all at once on May 15, 1955. Customers were welcomed with a Colonnade, “highlighted by square tiled columns and flowering plants.” A news review noted the thoughtful design: “Richness of natural color found in the center’s garden setting is highlighted by effective use of glass, metal frames, stained wood, brick and subtle touches of color harmony.”

Bon Air Hardware opened in 1955 with 2,700 square feet of floor space. Floyd Hilty and his son Murray had operated a hardware store in Berkeley before becoming one of the pioneer merchants at the shopping center. Grant Gildroy remembered the father-and-son operation. “They were super helpful, very paternal- that was true for most of the store owners- they didn’t treat you like an irritation. They had a gumball machine outside that had a striped ball in it, which had a lot of magic for a child,” Gildroy recalled. “If you got the striped ball you got a rabbit’s foot on a chain: I can remember Dale Herrero had three of four

of them on his belt, and that was a big deal.” The Hilty’s success led to a move into bigger quarters of 4,000 square feet in the center in 1959, which included an outdoor garden center.

Also in 1955, Louise Flynn opened the Greenbrae Salon of Beauty at Bon Air. Mrs. Flynn was noted for her stint in beauty school in Washington DC, where she worked as a hat-check girl at establishments that allowed her to take the hats of notable men such as Harry Truman and Sam Rayburn. ... Louis Nickle’s Greenbrae Barber Shop opened on June 1, 1955 with the classic red, white and blue barber’s pole in front., Charles Caine, a resident of Greenbrae since its inception, opened an outlet of San Francisco’s LaGrande Laundry and Cleaning Agency in 1955. ... John DeVries Interiors opened in 1956, proclaiming that “Thrift Begins with Quality.”...

...The Union 76 Service station opened in early 1957, directly across Sir Francis Drake from the Greenbrae Co. Castle. The Schultz Co and Union Oil collaborated on the planning and construction with the business operated and owned by Bob White and George Sosic. They opened a car wash adjacent to the station in 1959, noting that with its up-to-date equipment “we can clean a car satisfactorily in 3 minutes but we will take 6 to 8 minutes and be sure.” ... At opening, a car wash cost \$1.75.

Vidak’s restaurant was the first restaurant and cocktail lounge

to open in the Bon Air Center, on May 22, 1957. Second-generation Tony Vidak had worked at Paoli's Restaurant in San Francisco before starting his own establishment in Greenbrae. Vidak and his wife, Helen, made many of the furnishing, including chandeliers made from steer horns and lanterns. Mounted heads of deer and antelope, shot by Tony Vidak, and other exotic items decorated the dining room; a model outrigger canoe and other items graced the walls of the banquet room. The bar was of Honduras mahogany, "a relic of Barbary Coast days in San Francisco." Opening -day publicity promised, "Vidak's will offer the finest in continental food, at moderate prices, from Tony's charcoal broiler and ovens." The restaurant opened with a room full of Marin County dignitaries, invited guests, and members of the Schultz family. Upon opening to the public, Vidak had to turn away business, the lines were so long.

... Later, a restaurant called The Refectory was popular with Marin residents.

The Greenbrae Pharmacy held a grand opening in November of 1958 with pony rides, a clown, free Christmas trees and gifts, and a drawing for prizes. Husband-and-wife pharmacists Henry and Lorraine Brocco of Corte Madera both graduated from the University of California College of Pharmacy, and called their new store at 160 Bon Air "a handy, enjoyable place to shop." They were immediately busy in Greenbrae, with a staff that also handled cosmetics, greeting cards, stationary and photo supplies. Soon after commencing business, a branch of the San Rafael post office opened in the pharmacy with Henry Brocco acting as an unofficial postmaster. Curiously, the branch was legally located in Larkspur, but Greenbrae as a community fell within the San Rafael mail service area. More than 4,500 people lived within a mile of the new branch, justifying its creation. When Petrini's opened in a larger building down the way, the pharmacy moved into the old Bon Air Super building, greatly increasing its floor space...

... Frank Lucchesi, only 21 years old and already with eight years' experience, opened Frank's Shoe Repair in 1959. Lucchesi came from San Francisco where both his father and grandfather had been shoemakers. His employee George Osborn, who was deaf, was noted in the IJ as a man "whose skilled hands and cheerful outlook have enabled him to hear his living despite severe handicaps

By 1960 the Bon Air Shopping Center (now named Bon Air Center) provided the community with a grocery store, pharmacy, hardware store, barber shop and beauty salon, furniture and decorating showroom, laundry and dry cleaning, shoe repair, two gas and service stations and a car wash, in addition to a branch post office. The center became not only a hub for Greenbrae residents but also an important shopping area for central Marin County's growing population. More additions, including an expansion in 1985 that included a Long's Drugs (now CVS) and remodeling of the older stores, cemented Bon Air Center as an important commercial center in the heart of Marin.

Giving back to the Community: Join, Renew or Make a Donation to KGHS

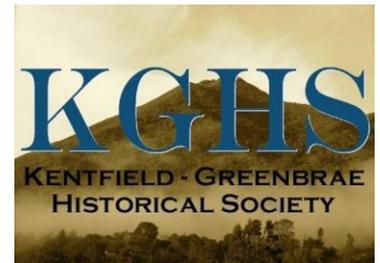
It's never too late to renew, join or make a donation:

- \$25 - Students & Seniors
- \$25- Non Profit organizations
- \$35 - Individuals & Families
- \$50 – Sponsor
- \$100 – Patron

Donations of any amount to support our Archive Preservation Project are welcome!

You can send a check:
KGHS Membership
Box 236
Kentfield, CA 94914.

Please include your name, level of membership, address, email and phone number. If you use a credit card number, please include your CVV code.



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