

Woman helped create grand national park



CARL NOLTE
NATIVE SON

When Amy Meyer was a young woman just out of college living in Brooklyn and thinking of the next chapter in her life, she went to her father for advice. He was a lawyer, wise in the ways of the world. "I was thinking of going into law, or art or medicine," she remembers. "Instead, he said, 'You should become a secretary or a nurse.'"

It was not that long ago: mid-'50s, in New York. "Women were expected to get married, stay home and raise children," Meyer said. "'Oh, no,' I said. 'I need to get away.'"

And she did. She and her new husband, George Meyer, a psychiatrist, moved to San Francisco and changed this part of the world.

Amy Meyer was a key figure in the creation of a huge national park centered around San Francisco's Golden Gate — a park that includes everything from Alcatraz Island, a redwood forest, a dozen beaches spread along a dramatic coastline, 140 miles of trails, 758 historic buildings covering more than 128 square miles, an area more than 2½ times the size of San Francisco. Last year it attracted 14.9 million visitors.

"No other city in America — or perhaps the world — has anything to compare to this," the Sierra Club said.

The National Park Service calls Amy Meyer the "Mother of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area."

I caught up with Meyer a couple of days ago in her comfortable house in San Francisco's Richmond District. It's where the huge park began.



Amy Meyer at her kitchen table — where the Golden Gate National Recreation Area was born.

Carl Nolte/The Chronicle

Meyer first saw the Bay Area in 1955 and was taken with its beauty. It was nothing like New York. She had come at a time when the region was changing — people were beginning to worry about threats to the environment that had come with explosive growth. There was a lot of citizen activism — and many of these activist groups were led by women.

It started in 1947 when Friedel Klusmann — Mrs. Hans Klusmann, as she was referred to in those formal days — organized a movement to save the cable cars.

In 1961, three Berkeley women — Sylvia McLaughlin, Catherine Kerr and Esther Gulick — organized the Save the Bay Association.

In 1965, three neighborhood housewives in San Francisco's Glen Park — Zoëanne Nordstrom, Joan Seiwald and Geri Arkush, organized to stop a freeway that would have de-

stroyed the pretty little Glen Canyon. They rallied the neighbors and eventually the city. The city's chief engineer called them "The Gum Tree Girls." "It wasn't a compliment," Seiwald said later. "The City Hall men hated us. We were resisting them."

So when Amy Meyer began her own activist career she realized she had come to the right city. "If I had been in the east I could not have done any of this," she said the other day.

The Golden Gate National Recreation Area began for Meyer in 1970, 15 years after she had arrived in San Francisco. She was living the comfortable life as a doctor's wife. They had two daughters. Still, something was missing. "I wanted to do something," she said.

One night she and her husband walked over to the nearby home of Dr. Edgar Wayburn, another physician and a friend

of the family and the president of the Sierra Club. The talk naturally turned to parks and Wayburn told them the National Park Service was thinking about the idea of turning old military land, seven obsolete forts in Marin and San Francisco, into parkland. It was just a planning exercise, the park service said. "It was a secret," Meyer says now. But it was just the thing she had been looking for.

By law, the park service could operate national parks and recreation areas, but could not advocate politically. So they let Meyer and Wayburn know if they wanted a national park they would have to work for it. It didn't take long for Wayburn and Meyer to team up. Wayburn had helped enlarge Mount Tamalpais State Park and had a role in the creation of the Point Reyes National Seashore. He knew his way around Sacra-

mento and Washington.

Amy Meyer was an organizer and master at getting things done. She had drive and unlimited energy. She and Wayburn became co-chairs of an organization called People for a Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Its world headquarters was on a big table in Meyer's house, just off the kitchen. Here dozens of volunteers spread out maps, dreamed of parks, and conducted a campaign for public support, mostly by U.S. mail. The table is still there, covered with a blue cloth, a vase of flowers and a bit of clutter.

You've heard of national parks and monuments. "I call this the National Mailing Table," Meyer said.

Here Wayburn and Meyer plotted strategy, unrolled maps of the region, and planned a campaign. One of their key allies was John Jacobs, executive director of SPUR, a San Francisco urban think tank that shared their vision. Jacobs helped persuade the city of San Francisco to hand over Ocean Beach, Aquatic Park and other properties to the GGNRA.

Political help was invaluable: They had the backing of two congressmen: William Maillard, a Marin Republican, and Phillip Burton, a San Francisco Democrat. Others came later, including Sala Burton,

Phillip's widow who also served in Congress, and Nancy Pelosi, who succeeded Sala Burton.

It's a long story and complicated. The original park plan grew from a few thousand acres to 34,000 in two years. More pieces came together: Now it is 82,000 acres.

"We had a lot of help," Meyers said. The timing was right, too. "The stars came together."

That and the work of a small determined woman who helped plan a park on her kitchen table.

Carl Nolte's columns appear in The Chronicle's Sunday edition. Email: cnohte@sfcronicle.com

Former babysitter sentenced for sexually abusing child

By Elizabeth Wilson

A former nanny will serve 15 years to life in prison for sexually abusing a child she used to babysit, the Contra Costa County District Attorney announced Thursday.

Michelle Hidalgo, a 29-year-

old Antioch resident, will also be required to register as a sex offender for the rest of her life, prosecutors said.

Hidalgo pleaded guilty to engaging in sexual acts with a child 10 years old or younger last September. Evidence found Hidalgo "created visual depic-

tions of the abuse and shared those images" on X, formerly known as Twitter, prosecutors said.

The Contra Costa County Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force received a notification that sexually explicit images of a child were shared

online. A search warrant was conducted at a residence in Antioch and Hidalgo was arrested. She has been in custody since Sept. 22, the date of her arrest.

"The sentence delivered today reflects the severity of the crime committed," said District

Attorney Diana Becton. "Our system of justice is dedicated to protecting victims and safeguarding the community by holding offenders accountable."

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This means that subscribers who live in areas that continue to receive home delivery will see a blank space at the bottom corner of page A1, while mail delivery customers will see their addresses printed in that area.

We realize this change may be disconcerting to some Bay Area customers who continue to receive home delivery, but it is necessary to ensure continued service for the many customers elsewhere who will now receive mail delivery. We appreciate your understanding in this matter.

Arts Commission to consider relocating 'Invocation' statue

By Sam Whiting

"Invocation," a 10-foot-tall eagle warrior sculpture by a famed Burning Man artist that was felled by a storm in San Francisco last year, is being repaired and may land at a city recreation center for permanent display.

The perforated steel sculpture sat for nearly 20 years on a strip of land next to the Highway 101 overpass at Cesar Chavez Street until a windstorm in March 2023 knocked down an adjacent eucalyptus, which crumpled the sculpture's legs. "Invocation" sat for weeks in a battered state before Caltrans, which owns the land, and the San Francisco Arts Commission, which owns the art, were able to negotiate its removal to a warehouse in the city.

Work to restore and conserve it is ongoing and will be completed this fall. On Tuesday, the



San Francisco Arts Commission "Invocation" by Pepe Ozan is being offered for display in the Portola district.

Arts Commission will hold a community meeting to discuss its possible relocation to the Palega Recreation Center in the Portola District. An online survey is available in advance.

The piece was commissioned in 2004 as a part-bird, part-human figure to honor the region's Indigenous heritage. The artist, Pepe

Ozan, was an Argentinian immigrant known for his huge sculptures that sat on the Black Rock Desert playa during the annual Burning Man festival in northwest Nevada. He died in 2013.

The original commission for the sculpture was \$10,000, and the cost of restoring and conserving it is \$65,000, according to the city.

The relocation of the Mesoamerican warrior statue will ultimately be decided by vote of both the Arts Commission and the Recreation and Park Commission. No date has been set for the transfer. It would replace a kinetic sculpture that had to be removed in 2016 for mechanical failure.

Tuesday's public hearing will be at 6 p.m. in the Palega Recreation Center, 500 Felton St.

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