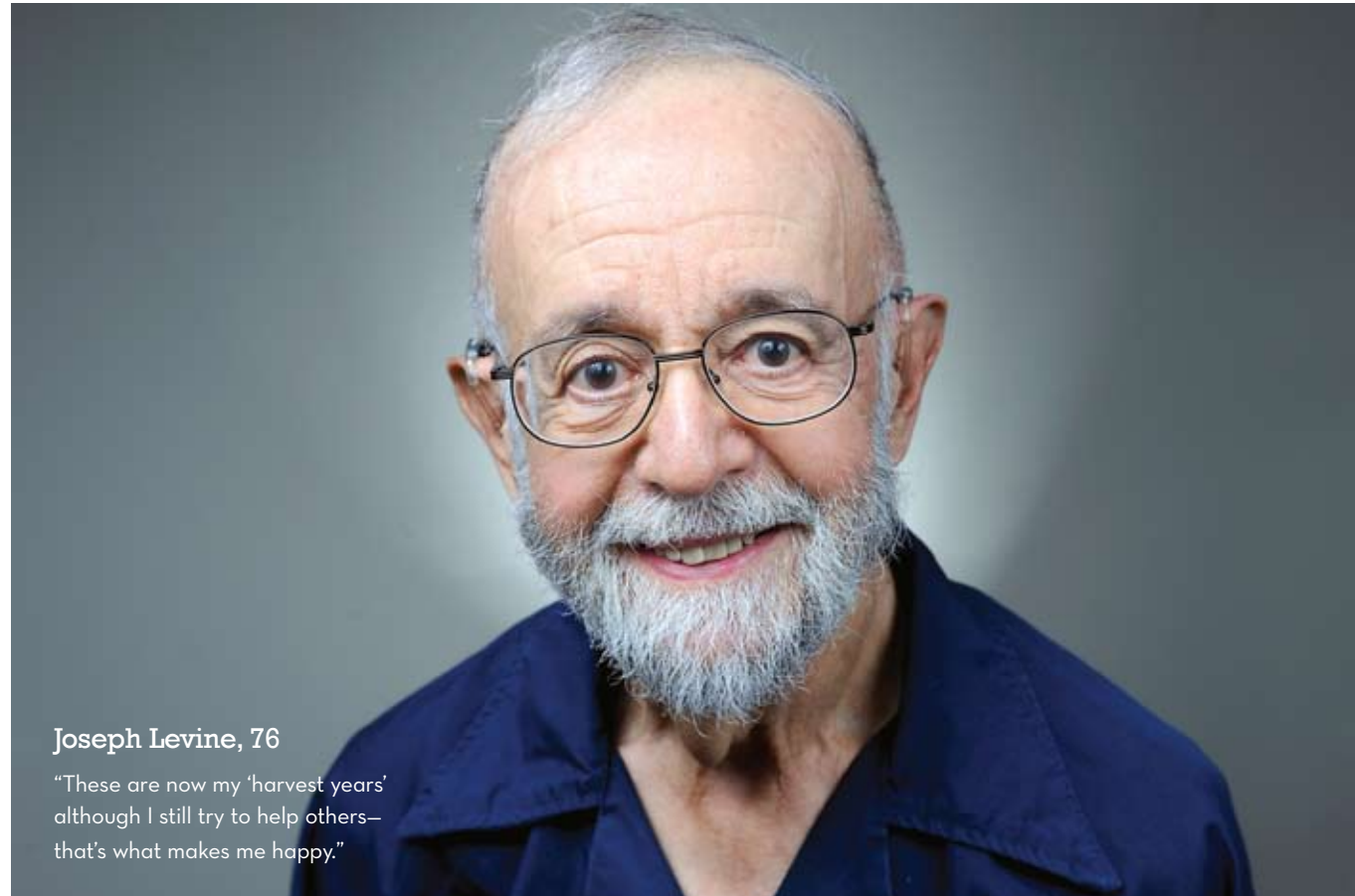


LIFE AT THE REDWOODS



BY JIM WOOD PHOTOS TIM PORTER



Joseph Levine, 76

"These are now my 'harvest years' although I still try to help others—that's what makes me happy."



Frieda Engel, 89

"Life's an adventure to be lived to the fullest—yet not just for one's self."

"IT'S A CULTURE, NOT A PLACE."

IN A ROUTINE ENTITLED "HOW TO STAY YOUNG," the late comedian George Carlin departed from his usual irreverent shtick and in a somewhat somber tone offered this advice: "Throw away nonessential numbers. This includes age, weight and height. Keep only your cheerful friends; the grouches pull you down." And: "Keep learning. Learn about computers, crafts, gardening, whatever."

Carlin might have combined all of the above in a fourth recommendation: "Aw, the heck with it; just move into The Redwoods. It's a community of seniors in Mill Valley."

Located across from Tamalpais High School, The Redwoods, built in 1972, has 330 units on 10 level acres brimming with trees and gardens whose greenery complements the wildness of neighboring Bothin Marsh. More than 330 people, average age 87, live there. And they do so in ways that make The Redwoods a unique place, one that, as executive director Barbara Solomon puts it, is "consistently breaking the mold as far as retirement communities go."

Resident Joseph Levine, 76, describes The Redwoods this way: "This isn't a place. It's a culture."

One direct expression of that culture is Seniors for Peace, an anti-war program that brings more than 130 residents together in weekly meetings, seminars, speaking events and, most visibly, Friday afternoon peace demonstrations at Miller Avenue and Camino Alto, where for the last seven years 30 or more residents have hoisted placards, banged on drums and chanted such slogans as "When governments lie, democracies die."

"But wait," comedian George Carlin might joke "there's more."

With help from College of Marin and other organizations, The Redwoods holds classes in opera appreciation, tai chi, yoga, ceramics, oil painting, computer use and strength training.

"We also have a communal organic garden that two dozen people tend," Solomon says, "and a Step Up–Step Out Club involving 100 residents, who so far this year have walked or hiked a grand total of more than 11,000 miles."

With four living categories—Independent, Residential, Personalized Assisted and Skilled Nursing—for which fees vary according to the services provided, The Redwoods provides one of the few affordable housing options for seniors in Marin. The downside: The waiting list for occupancy ranges from three months to five years, depending on category. "It changes on an almost daily basis," says Solomon, who has a staff of 135, of whom 40 percent have been with The Redwoods 10 years or longer.

Here is about when George Carlin would say, "Enough talk—let's meet some people."

JOSEPH LEVINE, 76

"I'm most proud of the fact I stayed the course in following my ideals. I never expected to get rich; I just wanted to help others, and somehow I found my niche. These are now my 'harvest years' although I still try to help others—that's what makes me happy. For example, my wife plays violin and I sing to people in nursing care who are confined by their

condition. When will I die? I recently received a Safe Food Handling certificate that's good until 2013, which sounds fine with me. What will happen when I die? There won't be angels playing harps, but I think the good (things) I've done will live after me. However, they weren't done because I was afraid of hell—I did them because they were the right things to do.”

Levine is especially proud of the slogan he coined: “This isn't a place, it's a culture.” He was raised in Brooklyn's Ridgewood neighborhood, graduated college in 1953, has been married twice and is the father of four boys (“all men of integrity”), three stepchildren and 11 grandchildren. His current activities include Seniors for Peace, predawn pick-up of food (hence the Safe Handling certificate) and flowers that are donated to The Redwoods, and organizing music, literary and religious programs for Redwoods residents.

FRIEDA ENGEL, 89

“I'm proud I was able to put it all together and keep it together. My husband, Joe, and I were ahead of our times—in the late '30s, we lived together before marriage and had many African-American friends. I received a graduate degree from Columbia in New York. We lived in Chicago for 17 years and then moved to San Francisco, where my specialty was sex education for social workers. After I retired, I was a couples therapist. If there is a key to a successful relationship, it's that each partner have a deep understanding of the other partner's needs. Life's an adventure to be lived to the fullest—yet not just for one's self. Its value includes what one has given to the world in the way of energy, ideas and ideals.”

Engel suffers from glaucoma and Sjögren's syndrome, which affects glands that produce tears and saliva. She has a prosthesis in one eye and only one-third vision in the other. Six years ago, she moved to The Redwoods, in her words, “kicking and screaming,” but now she “thoroughly enjoys” life there. Engel was married for 60 years; “I was just mad about the man,” she says. Her days now include attending Great Books discussion groups, exercise classes and talking with her friends. “And I'm especially proud of my role in getting the Seniors for Peace program up and running.”

KATIE DIEPENBROCK, 82

“I'm excited about the new cosmology. I just saw the DVD *Awakening Universe*, based on a book by Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme. It's about the birth of the universe and the formation of human consciousness. I've been on a spiritual path most of my life. What happens when I die? I feel strongly that after death you continue to open up to life. Death is followed by life and life by death. When a fetus is in the womb, it's safe and comfortable, with no idea of any other kind of life. Then it is born and a new state of existence begins. Right now, to all of us, death is an unknown. However, as I said, I really believe that after death you continue to open up to life.”

Diepenbrock graduated from UC Berkeley in 1948 and married shortly thereafter, raising seven children while living in Sacramento. After 30 years of marriage, she found herself divorced—and months later, her 21-year-old daughter died in a mountaineering accident. Seeking solace, Diepenbrock enrolled in Berkeley's Graduate Theological Union Seminary, then worked with women's retreat centers, and did organic farming on Orcas Island, Washington, where she was inspired by “witnessing indigenous people communicating with migratory whales.” After waiting seven years for an apartment to open, she has been at The Redwoods just nine months.

BILL USHER, 91

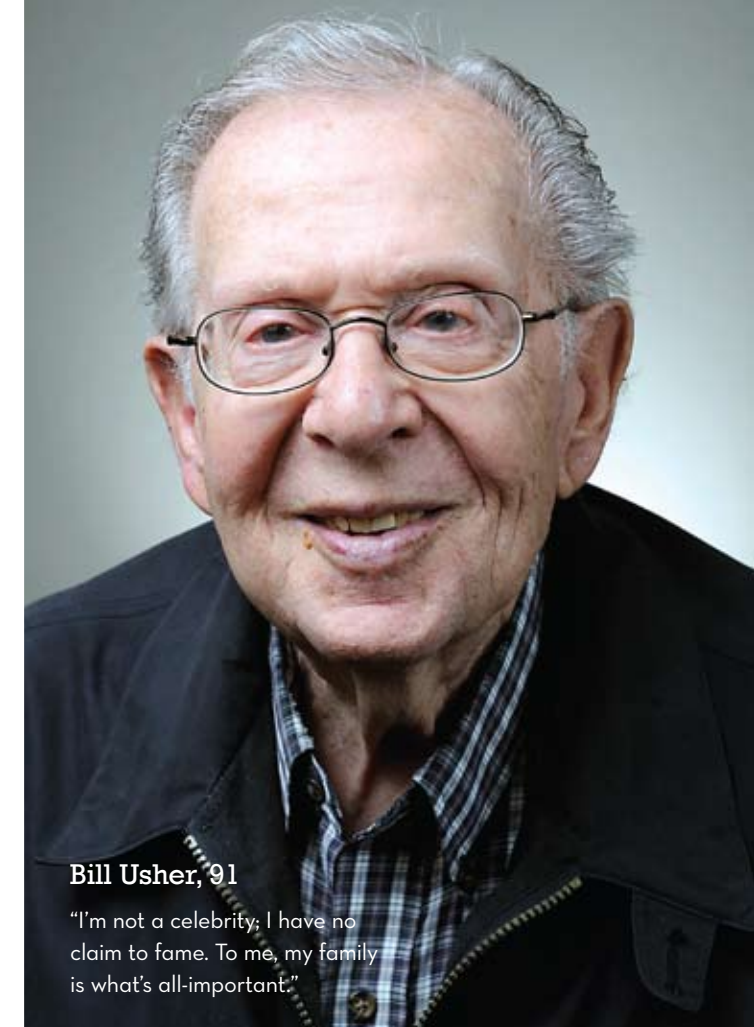
“I've never written a book, I'm not a celebrity; I have no claim to fame. To me, my family is what's all-important. I have two daughters, four grandchildren and four great grandchildren. We get together often and it's always a really nice, close time. My major involvement at The Redwoods is demonstrating for peace on Friday afternoons. I feel strongly about it. If I could talk to President Bush, I'd tell him 9/11 was justification for invading Afghanistan but our going into Iraq was wrong in the first place. We took our eye off the ball. It was a terrible, terrible mistake.”

Usher was born in New York City but grew up in Los Angeles' Boyle Heights neighborhood and graduated from UCLA in 1939. For much of his adult life, he and his brother ran a market and specialty store in downtown L.A. After moving to Marin in 1996, he volunteered at the Mill Valley Public Library. He now enjoys reading, playing poker and



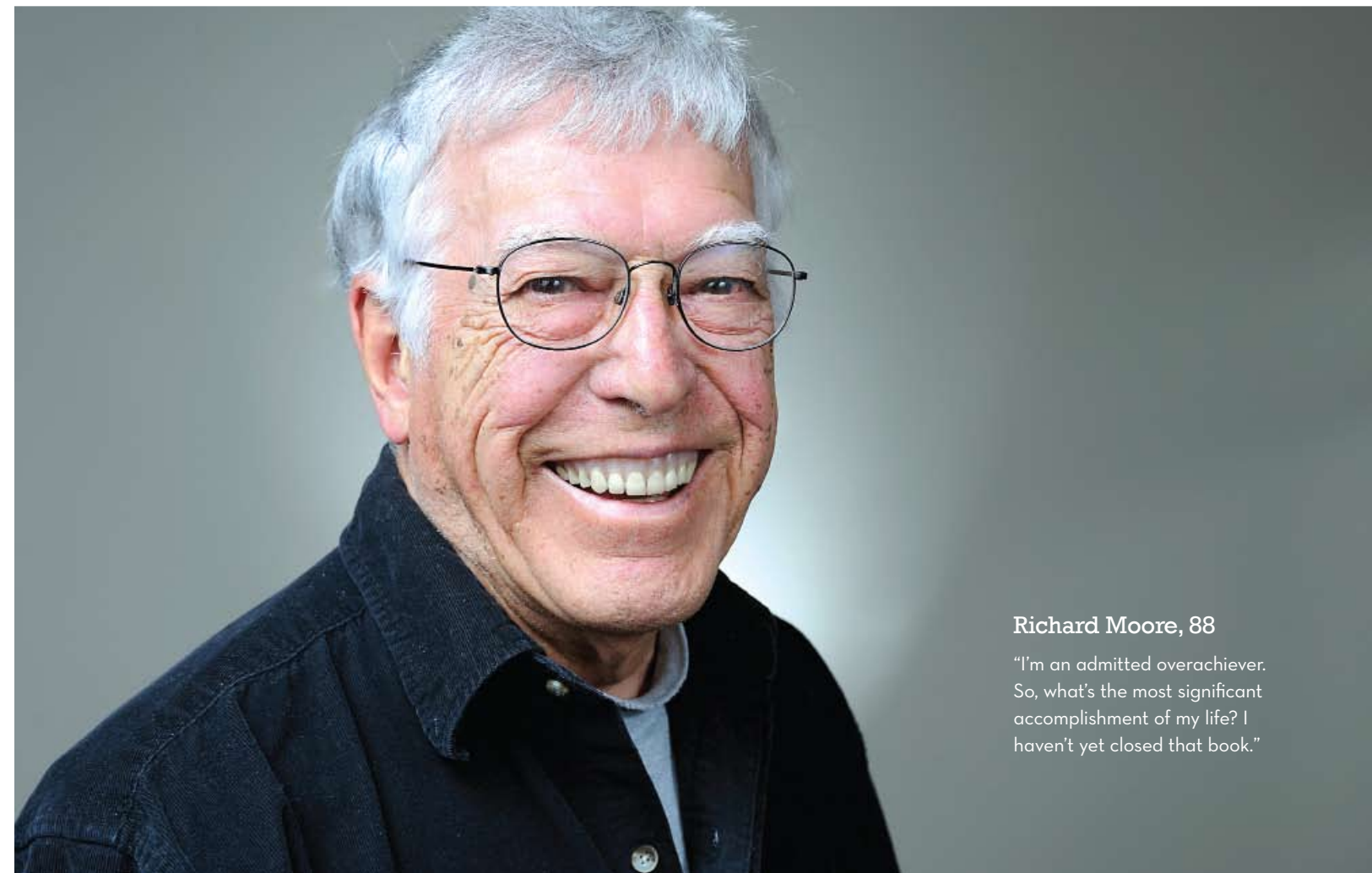
Katie Diepenbrock, 82

“I really believe that after death you continue to open up to life.”



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Richard Moore, 88

“I'm an admitted overachiever. So, what's the most significant accomplishment of my life? I haven't yet closed that book.”



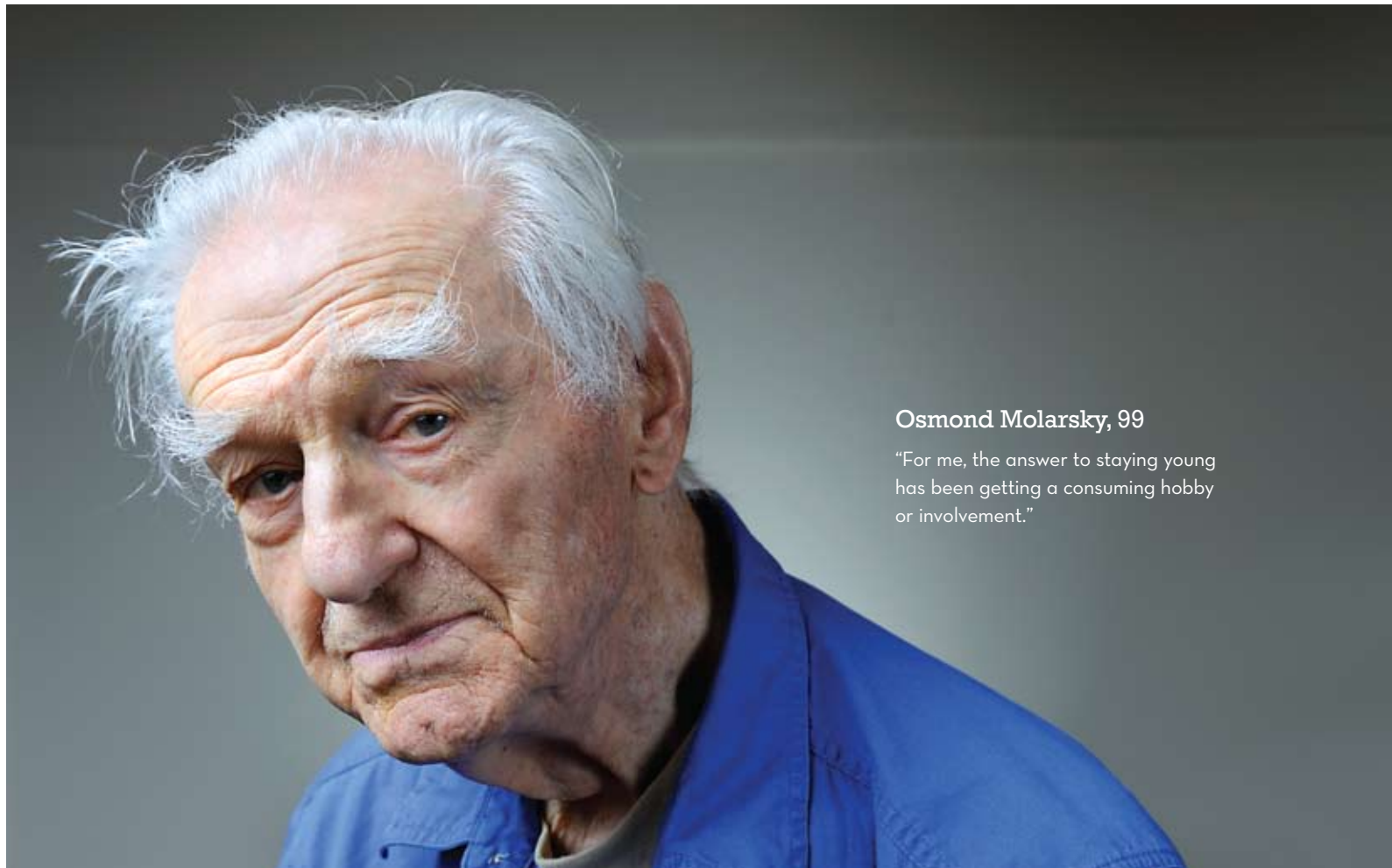
Audrey Hazen, 66

"I am among those who can see the tiny seeds, so I'm heavily involved in the planting of the garden."



Elizabeth Moody, 80

"I am concerned Marin County is growing in all the wrong directions."



Osmond Molarsky, 99

"For me, the answer to staying young has been getting a consuming hobby or involvement."

talking politics with friends, plus banging on his drum at the Friday afternoon peace demonstrations.

RICHARD MOORE, 88

"I'm an admitted overachiever. So, what's the most significant accomplishment of my life? I haven't yet closed that book. I can, however, say one aspect of my professional life is closed because I never plan to return to it: that's my career in alternative broadcasting with the founding of the Pacifica Foundation and radio station KPFA in Berkeley. What I now regard as my profession is my work in poetry. Eighteen years ago, I retired and said it was to work full time in this difficult field. In early 2010 UC Berkeley Press will release *Writing the Silences*, a collection of my poems from 1946 to 2008. I'm proud of this accomplishment—it puts a premium on my hanging around for at least a couple more years."

In addition to these achievements, Moore was also a ballet dancer, part of KQED's original staff and a documentary filmmaker, with more than 110 titles to his credit. He leads a monthly foreign policy discussion group at The Redwoods that attracts up to 60 residents. Moore has been married three times, once for 40 years, and has six

children. He attends exercise classes three times a week, teaches line dancing on Thursdays, and on most evenings enjoys either a shot of a single-malt Scotch or a nice cabernet.

ELIZABETH MOODY, 80

"I attend meetings many nights a week; however, tonight I'll be home, which is fine. For years, I've been concerned about affordable housing and now I am concerned Marin County is growing in all the wrong directions. Homes are getting bigger and more expensive. Sure, preserving all the open space is nice, but we've gone overboard. We are starting to lose our diversity and becoming an enclave for the wealthy. I hope to see more mixed-use zoning, where housing and retail coexist and people can walk instead of driving all the time. However, it's hard not to get discouraged—I guess that's where my religion, my spirituality, comes in. I know my God will be there to help me."

Moody, a respected name in Marin housing circles, graduated from USC in 1948 and has three children, eight grandchildren, and one great grandchild. She and her husband divorced after 30 years of marriage. Since 1965, when she lived in Novato, she has advocated for workforce housing, mostly through the League of Women Voters and EAH. Since

2001, she has chaired the Mill Valley Affordable Housing Committee and served on Marin's Housing Leadership Alliance. She is especially proud of the recently opened affordable housing units on San Clemente Drive in Corte Madera.

OSMOND MOLARSKY, 99

"How do I feel? A bit shaky walking. It's like I am crossing Niagara Falls on a high wire—and I'm on stilts. For me, the answer to staying young has been getting a consuming hobby or involvement. You live longer if there is something you really want to do. My passions have been writing, sailing and tennis. I'm thankful both my wives enjoyed sailing. In 1961, my second wife and I sailed up the coast of California from L.A. to San Francisco in our 1910 wooden cutter. However, the defining moment in my life came later, when I was 75. I had been taking tennis lessons for a year and one day served an ace past my instructor. His look of bewilderment, even shock, was something I'll never forget."

This soon-to-be-centenarian wrote for radio's *Cavalcade of America* series, scripted an award-winning one-act play and several navy training films and authored 16 children's books. At the urging of his friend, Isabel Allende, Molarsky has just completed a four-hundred page memoir,

My First One Hundred Years. "Writing is not my hobby," he says, "it's hard work. It's what keeps me going. I recommend it." Molarsky, whose second wife Peggy Hindes died five years ago, lives and works in a studio apartment at The Redwoods, which he chose for its informality and good food.

AUDREY HAZEN, 66

"I've been lucky. I became proficient in Portuguese during my five years in Brazil with the Peace Corps; then I taught English as a second language for 20 years at an East Bay middle school. I'm also fortunate to be with Betty, my life partner for the past 21 years. In addition, I help with the Step Up–Step Out hiking and walking program and love gardening. It's like therapy for me; I totally forget about everything else. I am among those who can see the tiny seeds, so I'm heavily involved in the planting of the garden. Betty and I had to wait over five years to get into The Redwoods, but now, after 16 months, we're so at home here."

Hazen was born in Wisconsin, the oldest of nine children. Before joining the Peace Corps, she participated in social justice efforts with Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chavez and led literacy and voter registration drives in the South. She says she "does what she can and then lets go," and avoids "burnout" by taking good care of myself."