

Grand Marshal
Paul Bunyan Days Parade
Sept. 2023
Marilyn Wagner

Marilyn Schoefer Wagner was born and raised in Burbank California, the daughter of Ernest and Betty Schoefer and she had one brother. Ernest Schoefer was a well know nurseryman and owner of the largest nursery in the San Fernando Valley, Burbank Horticultural Services. She attended Stanford University where she met her future husband, Larry Wagner, during their first year of college. After they earned their undergraduate degrees, they were married. They then went on to Graduate School together, also at Stanford. After graduating they set off on careers that took them all over the world. Larry became the Vice President of Colgate and Marilyn was an educator. She taught every grade of Elementary school from Kindergarten to Eighth grade. In their married life, they moved twenty-one times. They have lived all over the States and in Belgium. Their only son is the owner of the oldest Brewing Company in Texas, St. Arnolds in Houston. They have one grandson who is in his 3rd year of medical school.

Marilyn has been a family crisis counselor all over the U.S. She was the President of an international Study Club while living in Belgium. Marilyn was a writer for *Outlook Magazine*. She is a published author with two books to her credit: *Pole Cats* and *Cats and Other Tales* beginning with a short story about pre-Castro Cuba.

Currently, Marilyn is an Ambassador for the Mendocino Coast Chamber of Commerce. Along with her husband, she is a sponsor of the Mendocino Coast Film Festival. They are both big contributors to the community with the support they give to the Mendocino Theatre Company, Glorianna, and the artist community here on the Coast.

Marilyn and Larry began coming to the coast in 1961 when her parents, Ernest, and Betty Schoefer, moved here to create the Coast Botanical Gardens. Upon his

retirement from the nursery business, Ernest, well-known throughout California as a landscape artist, wanted to create his dream. He dreamed of creating a gift that would make the world a better place. He looked for the perfect place with the right soil, climate, and water to create a magnificent garden. He found the 47 acres here in Fort Bragg.

Ernest was a 1921 graduate of UC Davis with a degree in agriculture and botany. His early career was in agricultural real estate. As a nurseryman and landscape artist he created many wonderful gardens, some even for Hollywood elites.

Upon coming to the north coast and purchasing the 47 acres that we know as the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens he designed and create the gardens along with only one employee, Stan Lodarski. Before long other gardeners in the area began to take note of his endeavors. The Coast is an excellent area to grow Rhododendrons which are native to South East Asia and the Himalayas. Many local gardeners were growing various varieties and were happy to share them with Ernest. Bob and Mildred Boddy and Pearl Westerland were large contributors. Ernest also imported rare plants that he knew would do well in this climate. The Gardens were opened to the public in 1965.

Marilyn's mother, Betty, kept the books for the garden as well as opened a gift shop. The gift shop was known for its fine china, crystal, and paintings by California impressionist artists such as Paul Lauritz and Blessing LeMohns. Betty McNutt was the first sales clerk for the small nursery in the Garden. The couple lived in the farmhouse which is part of the Parrish Family Homestead.

In 1992 the property was purchased by the Coastal Conservancy and given to Mendocino Coast Recreation and Parks District. It is maintained by the Mendocino Coast Botanical Garden Corporation whose mission is to engage and enrich lives by displaying and conserving plants in harmony with our Northern Coastal Ecosystem.

Upon the death of Marilyn's mother, Marilyn and Larry inherited the home that her parents had built in 1979 overlooking the Gardens. At the time they were living a fabulous life in New Jersey with an apartment in New York. They even had well-known neighbors in New York such as Greta Garbo. But it didn't take much to convince them to give up all the glamour and move across the country to start

their new life here on the coast. They have lived here since 1992. They love living on the coast and they love the community of friends they have created here. Marilyn was very pleased to be asked to be the Grand Marshal of this year's Paul Bunyan Parade. She loves Fort Bragg and is excited to be participating as Grand Marshal.