

Bonny Doon Historian Takes a

by Karen Menehan

In the early days of theater, stages were lit by a flame directed at limestone to create an incandescent glow. Today, being named 2007 Historian of the Year by The History Forum at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and Natural History has placed Bonny Doon resident and author Bob Piwarzyk in the local limelight.

Piwarzyk ("pie-war-zik"), 70, has volunteered at Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park in Felton for almost 28 years, most notably as a historian and educator. He became a docent in 1988; in that role he interprets and teaches natural history, redwood ecology, logging and lime-industry history.

In May the latest book he co-authored, *Lime Kiln Legacies: The History of the Lime Industry in Santa Cruz County*, was published.

"He has a vast store of knowledge he allows us to tap into," said Jeff Price, a park interpretive specialist with the California State Parks System.

Piwarzyk's primary focus is on the history of lime manufacturing and the history of the importation and use of firebricks, which lined the lime kilns that dotted local mountains in the late 1800s, when Santa Cruz was the most important lime-manufacturing area in California. That interest has lent him the nickname "Brick Bat Bob."

Most of the lime was transported to San Francisco, where it was used to make plaster and mortar, according to *Lime Kiln Legacies* (www.limekilnlegacies.com).

More than 4,000 Volunteer Hours Donated

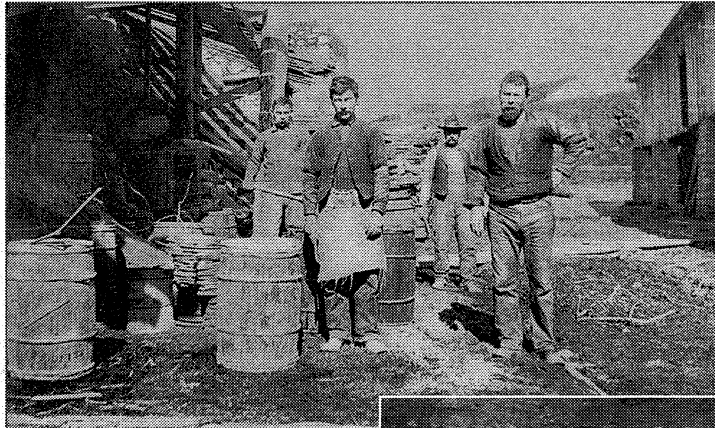
Piwarzyk is a lifetime member of the Mountain Parks Foundation, founded Lime Light, a group that promotes teaching the history of the lime industry, and also co-authored *Animals of the Santa Cruz Mountains, Valley of Redwoods and Davenport Cement Centennial*. He recently received a pin to commemorate the 4,000 hours he has volunteered as a docent, and was cited by Senator Barbara Boxer in 2006 for his service to Henry Cowell State Park.

The path this former Los

angeles County resident and aerospace-industry engineer traveled to become one of Santa Cruz County's preeminent historians is lined, perhaps not surprisingly, with bricks.

From Marines to Flight Test Engineer

But focusing on college and career meant leaving bricks far behind. Piwarzyk graduated from the University of Massachusetts in 1959, spent three years in Marine Corps Aviation, then moved to Long Beach to work as a flight test engineer for the Douglas Aircraft Company.



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Piwarzyk was born in 1937 in Holyoke, Massachusetts, an industrial town then known as Brick City for its numerous mills, factories and tenements built from brick.

His grandfather, a Polish immigrant, was a bricklayer, and Piwarzyk's father worked for a time as a hod-carrier. As



Above: Bob Piwarzyk turn-of-the-century cook