

They're On Job When It Rains

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(Second of three articles.)
By BILL NEUBAUER
Sentinel Staff Writer

While San Lorenzo Valley may be the county's biggest rain bucket, there is ample work during the stormy season for other rainkeepers who regularly report measurements to The Sentinel.

Through their efforts, too, life is certainly made more interesting for weather-watchers in general. On occasion, life is made a bit easier and safer, as well — the measurements being useful in estimating at home the conditions under which the daily bread winner may have to commute to his work.

Rainkeeper in Mt. Hermon, often called the "bridge" between San Lorenzo Valley and Scotts Valley, is A. E. (Gene) Lacy of Prospect Road.

"I suppose the rainy season I won't forget is that of 1955," Lacy said. "The river filled up

with logs, and the flood did considerable damage not only in San Lorenzo Valley but in Santa Cruz. I recorded 8.7 inches of rain on Dec. 23 of that year, and 2.47 inches the following day."

Born in Missouri, Lacy came to California when he was eight years old. The family settled in Stockton, where Lacy later worked as a teacher of upper elementary grades. He moved to Santa Cruz in 1945, and in 1953 took over the rainkeeping duties at Mt. Hermon from Harry Stine. Lacy was Mt. Hermon postmaster for eight-plus years from 1954 until his retirement. He now keeps busy doing maintenance work around the Bible conference center, and, with his wife, Edith, participates in a broad range of center activities.

In Scotts Valley off Granite Creek Road, the chances are you will more often than not find official rainkeeper A. E. Blair up a tree these days.

Wally Trabing's Mostly about People



Wally Trabing is on vacation. His column will be resumed when he returns.

SV Youth Crafts Contest Deadline Set For Jan. 15

A crafts contest for youths in the 6 to 16 age bracket will end in Scotts Valley on Jan. 15, according to Ed Milewski, volunteer director of the SV youth activities program.

"Model cars and aircraft, ceramic objects and paintings must be finished and entered in the contest not later than Jan. 15 to qualify for judging," Milewski said. "Prizes will be awarded in these four categories, each appropriate to the hobby interest of the winners."

The contest is the first of any planned in the youth activities program, which has the support of the city administration and local business groups and residents. The program is open without

charge to all SV youths who have special hobby interests and wish to work on their own projects with the aid of volunteer adult counselors.

Over 60 youths are now registered in the program, Milewski said. Work sessions are held Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 3 to 5 p.m. and on Saturdays from 1 to 5 p.m. at The Hangar, which is adjacent to Sky Park Airport, at the rear of SV city hall grounds.

The Hangar will be reopened for youth activities on Jan. 6, Milewski said.

"Youths who have still to finish their projects are reminded there will be but five work sessions between now and Jan. 15," Milewski added.

An apple tree, that is. Blair has about 25 acres planted in Golden Delicious Red Delicious and Newton Pippins. The orchard spreads along a mountain stepland that is colorful just now with wild mustard. On a clear day the Blairs can see Monterey Bay.

Blair is a pruner as well as a rainkeeper at this time of year. Object is to improve the quality and quantity of the fruit he sells both to wholesalers and to local retail customers. Many in Scotts Valley claim that Blair's apples are sweeter, because of local climate conditions, than those grown in other areas.

Blair's father, A. E. Blair Sr., was an Aptos rancher. In 1947, young Blair and his wife, Rosa, bought the Scotts Valley ranch. Their son, Charles, who has just come home from the Marines, is adding to the ranch at the southern end of the stepland. The Blairs also have two daughters, Virginia Jones and Irene Cook.

Blair has been a rainkeeper since 1947.

"Biggest storm I recall," he said, "was in February of 1950. It measured 8.45 inches. It came down at an inch an hour."

Another storm Blair recalls hit the area in 1959, on Sept. 18 and 19, while he was picking fruit.

"On Sept. 18 we had 7.05 inches of rain," he recalls wryly. "And on Sept. 19 we had another 2.45 inches."

Probably no rainkeeper in Santa Cruz County is better known than Robert Burton, a highly respected former county supervisor who been a weather observer for nearly 40 years.

Last September Burton was honored for his "unusually competent" service by the federal Environmental Science Services Administration in ceremonies before the county supervisors.

The ceremonies included presentation of the Thomas Jefferson Award to Burton to commemorate his long years as a volunteer Santa Cruz weatherman.

Burton was also cited for his "valuable innovations in observing weather phenomena." His method of measuring the amount of fog and mist absorbed by redwood trees in the area was described as "unique."

Burton received degrees in agriculture and forestry, and later did postgraduate work at Stanford in government and science.

He came to Santa Cruz shortly after his marriage in 1916, and for the next 27 years Burton was a teacher at Santa Cruz High School.

In World War II Burton was sent to the South Pacific to help displaced natives learn about new food crops and agricultural methods. In 1948-49, Burton went to the Caroline Islands, where he conducted agricultural research.

Burton resumed his weather observing duties in Santa Cruz in 1952. He served two terms on the Santa Cruz city council, then was elected supervisor in 1960, a job he gave up at the end of his second term in 1963.

In Aptos, on an 800-foot hilltop that overlooks the hills and valleys and sea, a brand new grandmother acts as rainkeeper for The Sentinel and provides other weather data to the U. S. weather bureau.

She is the wife of Dr. Alan H. Nittler. She saluted the arrival of her first grandchild on Dec. 10 by putting on a button that proclaims to the world: "I Am A Grandmother." The grandchild is Patricia Lyn Parodi, daughter of Karen and William Parodi.

Mrs. Nittler has been a Sentinel rainkeeper a bit more than a year. "I've always been interested in the weather and in its effect upon people," she said.

Her interest was stimulated through her work as secretary to a U.S. Navy captain first at Floyd Bennett Field in New York and then at Camp Parks near Mt. Diablo. Now, on a hilltop made magnificent by avocado and other fruit trees and great clumps of cacti, Mrs. Nittler has an assortment of weather instruments to provide authoritative data to professional weather watchers.

The Nittlers also keep busy with experimental work on avocado trees and dog diet. Only natural methods are used in the tree culture — no chemical sprays or fertilizers are ever used. "Our object is to develop a better product, without a taste of chemicals in the fruit," Mrs. Nittler said.

A dog diet the Nittlers have developed includes pure horse-meat, raw egg, and diatermateous earth.

"The diatermateous earth is used to keep parasites out of the intestinal tract," Mrs. Nittler said. "A pure white German shepherd we have is on the diet and exhibits no scaling or yellowing of its teeth."

Mrs. Nittler has worked with Girl Scouts for 10 years and has been president of the Santa Cruz County Girl Scout Council.

Norma Nelson, who formerly wrote the popular Harbor Lights

column for The Sentinel, acts as rainkeeper for Capitola. Mrs. Nelson also works for Capitola as city clerk.

Mrs. Nelson became an official rainkeeper after she commented in The Sentinel newsroom one day: "Rain also falls in Capitola, but how much?"

"Heads nodded," she said, "and that's how I started."

Wife of Hill Nelson, an electrician who is building a 36-foot ketch in his spare time, Mrs. Nelson writes a column for a weekly newspaper, writes a boating column entitled "Santa Cruz-ing" for The Yachtsman, a boating magazine, and also writes advertising copy.

She is also engaged on a long-term writing project for which she has done research in Louisiana.

The Nelsons have four grown children.

The Nelson rain gauge is kept on the sundeck of their home in the southernmost area covered by The Sentinel's coastal rainkeepers.

"It's out in the open, with nothing near it from which the wind can squirt illegal raindrops into the tube," Mrs. Nelson said.

Soquel rainfall is measured for The Sentinel by John Harlamoff at the end of Maplethorpe Lane. An American by choice, Harlamoff came to the United States from central Russia in 1922. To get here he made the arduous trek to San Francisco by way of Vladivostok, China, Korea and Japan, where he embarked for the New World at Yokohama.

After wooing and winning the hand of Ethel Jones, daughter of Billy Jones, Harlamoff and a Russian partner started a chicken ranch on the Old San Jose Road in 1926.

"When we started the chicken ranch we were told by Henry Washburn, the university agricultural adviser, that only about 5 per cent made a success of

the business," Harlamoff said. "But we developed the ranch according to University of California plans, even putting in concrete where they told us to. It was a very good business for us. We stayed in partnership until we developed two ranches, equally as large, and then we each took a ranch."

At the ranch the chickens had a normal life — not spending their years in those little wire cages and wondering what on earth the earth is all about.

The Harlamoffs kept 4000 White Leghorns before they sold out in 1946. Now the ranch is "buried under houses," as Harlamoff put it.

"The chicken business has changed," he said. "We could make a good living with our 4000 chickens. But now we hear of people with 50,000 chickens who do not do as well."

Harlamoff has been a rainkeeper for 17 years, three of these as a reporter for The Sentinel.

"I always watched the weather column in the paper," he said. "All of a sudden the Soquel report was dropped. So I telephoned, and I have been reporting for Soquel ever since."

The Harlamoff's daughter, Mrs. Frank (Barbara) McCrary, is wife of The Sentinel's newest volunteer rainkeeper in Swanton.

Editor's Note: The last two articles in Bill Neubauer's series on the county's rain record keepers were published out of sequence. The article above concludes the three-part series which began in Sunday's edition of The Sentinel.



Chris Hummel, 9, of Bonny Doon, is the youngest county rainkeeper. It took 10 months for his parents, Donald and Marilyn Hummel, to import that special rain gauge from England. It's read in hundredths of inches. It's considered the most accurate of rain gauges, except for electronic ones, because of the scale and

because overflow can't get away. In the boy's fourth grade class at Bonny Doon School, teacher Vera Hulse is conducting a weather course for highly interested students. Can you identify the clouds displayed in background? Clockwise from upper left are cumulonimbus, towering cumulus, cirrus and cumulus clouds.

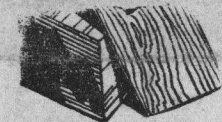
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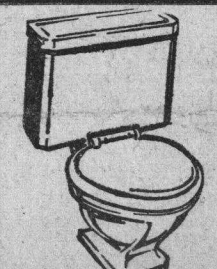


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