

# CLIMATE CORNER

## Piedmont gardens flourish during pandemic



Julia Burke's wildflower sidewalk strip in front of her house.

By Marjorie Blackwell

As ongoing shelter-in-place takes its toll on daily life, many Piedmonters have found new and continued pleasure in their backyards. Just ask Eric Dam, manager of ACE Garden Center.

"Everyone is gardening," Dam said. "They're creating Victory Gardens. In the spring, we ran out of vegetable seeds. Now there's a shortage of bark and soil, and our native plant supply clears out every week."

Julia Burke, a member of the Piedmont Garden Club and an avid native-plant gardener and beekeeper, is delighted to see more gardens springing up in town, especially with drought-tolerant and native species. She is hoping to see more city properties and sidewalk strips planted with wildflowers.

"People need to know that native gardens can make a difference for wildlife and for drought," she says. "These plants have evolved over thousands of years to withstand six months of drought. Non-natives don't attract the insects that birds need to survive and feed their young. They need diversity.

"The whole food web depends on natives, and it's just as easy to grow them as non-natives," she said.

As the city's Climate Challenge notes, replacing 1,000 sq. ft. of lawn with drought-tolerant plants can save up to 20,000 gallons of water a year. (See [www.piedmontclimatechallenge.org/action/replace-lawn](http://www.piedmontclimatechallenge.org/action/replace-lawn).)

Burke replaced the lawn in front of her house on LaSalle five years ago. Since then she has transformed the area into a hillside of colorful wildflowers including California poppies that reseed every year. Her fenced backyard is devoted to more wildflowers, vegetables, and beekeeping. She lets her lettuce, chard, and broccoli flower go to seed for the bees.

This year, Burke planted all of her vegetables from seed and gave away six-packs of seedlings to friends.

"Sunflowers are also a wonderful addition to attract birds and bees," she said. "My yard is not landscaped, and I would never have anyone blowing it to disturb the leaves or the soil."

Burke's interest in beekeeping began when she learned about

it from Piedmonters Carter and Patty Dunlap (whose beekeeping and fruit tree garden will be featured in a future Climate Corner).

"I thought I was allergic to bees," Burke said, "but after getting stung a few times, I found I wasn't allergic. It's Zen-like to watch the bees coming and going." Plus, they give her 30 pounds of honey a year – a pretty sweet deal.

### RESOURCES

Piedmont Climate Challenge: [www.piedmontclimatechallenge.org](http://www.piedmontclimatechallenge.org) (Click "water" under "actions.")

StopWaste: [www.stopwaste.org/at-home/home-gardening/gardening-during-covid-19](http://www.stopwaste.org/at-home/home-gardening/gardening-during-covid-19)

California Native Plant Society: [www.cnps.org](http://www.cnps.org)

Ecology Center, Berkeley: [ecologycenter.org](http://ecologycenter.org)

*Climate Corner is a collaboration between the city of Piedmont and Piedmont Connect, a local environmental nonprofit, to raise awareness about climate actions in the community. If you have suggestions for a Climate Corner article, e-mail Ronna Kelly at [ronna.abramson@gmail.com](mailto:ronna.abramson@gmail.com).*



Julia Burke in her garden of wildflowers with a life-size sunflower.

## OBITUARY

### Builder Neil Guiney, a Renaissance man, dies May 7 at age 75

Neil Guiney, a resident of Piedmont for 24 years, passed away peacefully at home in Oakland on May 7, 2020 after a brief struggle with cancer.

Born Neil Terrence Guiney on February 14, 1945 in San Francisco, he was the son of Katherine Sullivan Guiney and Neil Joseph Guiney and a lifelong Bay Area resident.

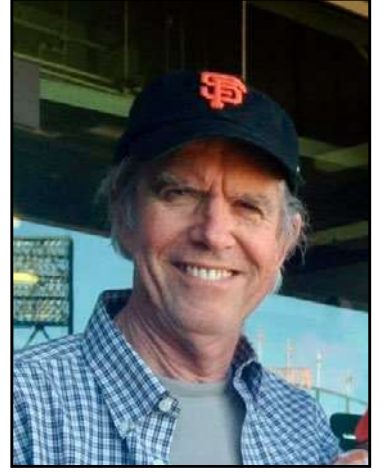
He was a member of the first graduating class of St. Francis High School in Mountain View. After graduating from St. Mary's College in Moraga, he earned a Master's Degree in English with an emphasis on Irish Theater from San Francisco State University in 1969. Upon completing his education in the arts, he became a carpenter, obtaining his General Contractors License in 1976.

He married Julie Ann Fielder in 1973, and in 1979 they moved from San Francisco to Piedmont where they raised their two children. In 2003, they moved to Oakland, where they ultimately retired.

As a builder he created beautiful homes, remodeling each of his houses to his exacting taste and specifications, just as he did for scores of clients over the years. His workshop in the garage was his favorite place to be, where he crafted furniture and worked on myriad projects.

Neil was a Renaissance man at heart. He enjoyed playing many instruments throughout his life, from the piano to the fiddle. He loved literature, his vegetable garden, handwoven textiles and a wide variety of music and art. He spent many happy hours in museums throughout the world. In 2018, after a painstaking search of family records, Neil was very proud to obtain the necessary documentation that allowed him a dual citizenship in Ireland and the U.S.

Though an avid 49ers and Warriors fan, his true love was the San Francisco Giants, a love he shared with his father. In 1958



Neil Guiney, a resident of Piedmont for 24 years, passed away on May 7. He was 75.

Neil's father watched the parade welcoming the Giants to San Francisco in front of his financial district office. Fifty-two years later, in 2010, when the SF Giants finally won a World Series title, Neil stood proudly in front of that same building with his own son, watching the parade go by and knowing his father was with them in spirit.

Above all he loved his family and demonstrated that in gestures both grand and small. The family is devastated by his loss.

Neil is predeceased by his parents, and is survived by his wife Julie, daughter Ann, son Dennis (wife Micaela Garcia), granddaughter Teresa, his brother Stephen (wife Brooke), brother and sister-in-law (John and Susan Fielder) and loving nieces and nephews Sean, Katherine and Connor Guiney, Jane Fielder and Robyn Fielder Pichel.

He was a man who lived by the Henry Kaiser maxim: "When your work speaks for itself, don't interrupt."

A celebration of Neil's life has been indefinitely postponed due to current public health concerns. The family suggests that memorial donations in the name of Neil Guiney may be made to the St. Anthony Foundation or to an arts organization of your preference.

## READ IT IN THE POST

### Mr. Rogers

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how precious they are and how hungry we are for their return.

In an article on Mr. Rogers in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Johnathan Merritt noted the saying that Mr. Rogers used to close each show: "You've made this day a special day by just your being you. There is no person in the whole world like you, and I like you just the way you are."

Some have suggested that this message sought to instill children with a sense of self-importance, but to believe that is to fundamentally misunderstand Fred Rogers. At the core of Rogers' mission was the paradoxical Christian belief that the way to gain one's life is to give it away.

"The underlying message of the Neighborhood," Rogers once said, "is that if somebody cares

about you, it's possible that you'll care about others. You are special, and so is your neighbor – that part is essential: that you're not the only special person in the world. The person you happen to be with at the moment is loved, too."

We don't have saints in the Protestant church. But, if we did, I'd nominate Mister Rogers.

Saint Fred – the patron saint of neighborliness.

*Rev. Dr. William McNabb is Senior Minister of Piedmont Community Church, 400 Highland Avenue, Piedmont.*

*The Religion Corner appears weekly in the Post and expresses the views of a variety of faiths.*

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