

# Phil Frank, "Farley" cartoonist and Bolinas historian, dies at 64

By Larken Bradley

Phil Frank, the *San Francisco Chronicle* cartoonist whose popular comic strip "Farley" sometimes poked good-natured fun at West Marin, died in Bolinas on Wednesday, Sept. 12, of a brain tumor. He was 64.

Mr. Frank also drew with writer Joe Troise the nationally syndicated, "Elderberries," a strip featuring a cast of characters living in a retirement home.

When he wasn't drawing, Mr. Frank's avocation was local history. He adopted the role of town historian for Bolinas, where he kept an old farmhouse and barn as a weekend retreat. In 2004 he wrote *Bolinas and Stinson Beach*, for Arcadia Publishing's local-history series. At the Bolinas Museum, he designed and curated its permanent history room along with many exhibits.

Along with his artistic flair and meticulous attention to historical detail, Mr. Frank had innate charm and an ability to engage with others. In the 1970s he mended a community rift when many old families left Bolinas after throngs of young idealists moved to town, showing little regard for established residents and their dreams of commercial development.

Over time, Mr. Frank connected with the families, encouraging them to return. "The most important thing about Phil is that he went out and brought back original families to Bolinas," said Elia Haworth of the Bolinas Museum.

## "FARLEY" IN POINT REYES STATION

Working in a studio in the pilothouse of an old ferryboat docked near his Sausalito home, Mr. Frank created the cartoon char-

acter Farley, a newspaper reporter and occasional park ranger who, along with his comedic colleagues, cast a wry glance at Bay Area life, especially San Francisco's mayors.

Mr. Frank's local themes included issues with the Bolinas Lagoon and Bolinas residents' long-standing commitment to tearing down the "Bolinas 2 miles" road sign from Highway 1.

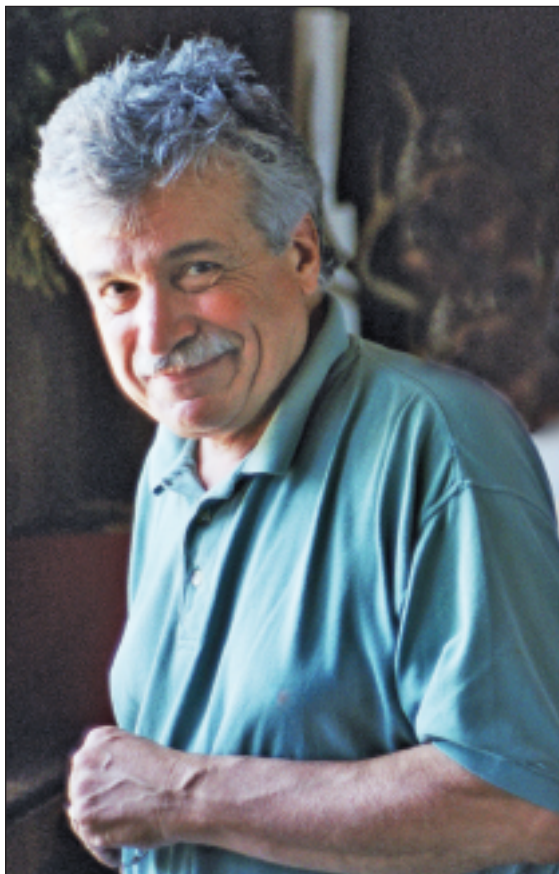
This week Dave Mitchell, editor and publisher emeritus of *The Point Reyes Light*, wrote in an email message:

"I remember a Phil Frank series of two or three strips that ran many years ago and involved the late Toby Giacomini. The series opened in front of Toby's Feed Barn, where Toby, dressed in overalls and a baseball cap, is bending over to set down a box of oranges.

His back is to the street, and a passing carload of pranksters from Inverness throws something that hits Toby in the butt."

Added Mitchell, "The prank is taken as an attack on Point Reyes Station by Inverness, and the cartoon says something about 'ancient rivalries' being rekindled. By the end of the series, residents in Inverness are using a catapult to hurl some sort of mess across Tomales Bay onto Point Reyes Station, where a woman in a lookout tower is yelling, 'Incoming!'"

"I later asked Toby what he thought of the series. 'I don't like how big it made my butt look,' Toby grumbled."



PHIL FRANK, 2003 (Photo by Dewey Livingston)

## BUSHWHACKING FOR HISTORY

*Citizen* cartoonist Kathryn LeMieux, a longtime friend of Mr. Frank said, "Phil was a master artist. With a simple fountain pen, India ink and drawing paper, he created a world full of whimsy, clever wordplay and characters that embraced the better

## Bridging old and new Bolinas

The following is a letter written in nomination of Phil Frank for the 2007 Marin Community Foundation Beryl H. Buck "Bridge Builders" Award.

In Bolinas, Phil has been a significant bridge maker between generations in our community. The early 1970s brought a painful schism in Bolinas between older long-time residents who saw progress for the community as extensive residential and commercial development versus the flood of idealistic, conservation-minded young people who took over the town without concern for the established residents. Some members of the pioneer families felt deeply disrespected and offended and moved away. Phil drew many of those family members back to the community.

Phil slowly cultivated the confidence of those old-timers until they felt recognized and a part of the community once again. Anybody can glean history from books or documents but Phil has skill and patience and his interest is genuine. That makes people trust him so they share their firsthand memories and family stories with him, and Phil shares the importance of their stories with all of us. In return, the old-timers felt comfortable with contributing invaluable historic photographs, documents, oral histories and objects to the museum, to be preserved for all of us and future generations.

Ralph Camiccia

Past President of the Board of Directors of Bolinas Museum and former Bolinas Fire Chief

part of humanity."

West Marin historian and *Citizen* columnist Dewey Livingston recalled hiking and bushwhacking excursions he took with Mr. Frank in West Marin, searching for obscure historical spots.

Remarking on the thoroughness Mr. Frank brought to his work, Livingston said, "As an amateur historian, Phil outshined so many scholars because he did it right."

After finding a charred lockbox of singed documents related to the Briones family, early settlers of Bolinas, Mr. Frank examined each piece and researched the documents, which led to a groundbreaking exhibit being mounted at the Bolinas Museum, Livingston recalled.

Five collections of "Farley" comic strips were published, and Mr. Frank also illustrated four guidebooks written by his wife, Susan Frank.

## BELONGED IN ANOTHER ERA

He sat on the board of the Yosemite Association, a private group formed to support the national park. He was a member of the Bohemian Club and was elected an honorary California State Park ranger. He also volunteered for many years with the Sausalito Historical Society.

Said Dolores Richards, past executive director of the Bolinas Museum, "Phil felt he was born in the wrong era because he loved everything old."

Mr. Frank is survived by his wife, Susan Frank of Sausalito; son, Phil Frank of Portland, Oregon; and his daughter, Stacy Frank of Santa Cruz.

A memorial service is being planned.

Family members suggest that any memorial contributions be made to the Yosemite Association; the Sausalito Historical Society; or the Bolinas Museum.

West Marin Citizen, Sept. 20, 2007

## Student authors to read works

Students of West Marin Literacy Services will read from their works from 5 to 7 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 27, at the literacy offices in the Creamery Building in Point Reyes Station (located near the library.) Audience members will receive a free copy of the 2007 student writing collection, "Different Worlds/Many Voices." Following the readings, the library will celebrate the opening of its new space from 7:15 p.m. to 9 p.m. with music from Harmony Grisman. The following is an excerpt from one of the collection's stories.

## 'That is my child'

By Rosalba

When I arrived at the U.S. border, the immigration agents took my child. I had given my baby to a "coyote" to carry him across the border, but the agents took my baby from her because the woman was dark-skinned, and my child was fair-skinned. In Tijuana, we had to call the doctor in Jalisco to verify that I had given birth to the child and that he was mine. The doctor had to fax papers to the immigration officers. The officers also spoke to my parents by phone. My baby and I were separated for five days at the border. After I got my baby back, we dressed him as a girl because we didn't want to get caught again.

Rosalba and her husband have been married eight years. They live on a ranch in West Marin and attend English class together. Their literacy tutor is Carla Twitchell

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