

# An early love of the outdoors led to a lifetime dedicated to environmental preservation

by Lisa Bograd

*(ED. NOTE: In anticipation of Earth Day, April 22, Discoveries is profiling Bob Sharp, one of the West County's leading environmentalists, whose personal efforts at conservation have made a difference in preserving a small part of the earth for future generations.)*

**O**n a languid Sunday afternoon, Bob Sharp is sitting at a table in his backyard on Fiori Lane with his back to the sun, sipping a tall glass of iced tea. Surrounding him is a luscious natural landscape: yellow acacia trees hover over long stemmed white callallilies as purple forget-me-nots peer out playfully among creeping calendula, juicy succulents and wild raspberry vines.

Reminiscent of "The Secret Garden," the scene is a perfect backdrop for the man who has made a name for himself as one of the West County's foremost environmentalists.

"There is something about the outdoors that has always fascinated me," says Sharp, chairman of the Western Sonoma County Rural Alliance, and former chairman of the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation.

He does not elaborate. In fact, the erudite 80-year-old offers little more than one-liners when asked to expound upon any question unrelated to his great love of Mother Earth.

When he's talking about environmental issues, however, the words gush from his lips with the force of a waterfall. A beginner's lesson in the various stages of wastewater treatment, for

example—"primary treatment means letting the effluent settle, aeration is oxygenating the effluent material and tertiary treatment means chlorination of the effluent"—lasts a good ten minutes.

Sharp is a fountain of wisdom on topics ranging from water to wildlife to wetlands—a wisdom acquired through more than five decades of work in the environmental field.

**A** Minnesota native, Sharp moved to Sebastopol in the mid-1970s with his wife, Dorothy, after retiring from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Minneapolis where he worked as a branch chief for approximately 30 years. Drawing from an extensive background in water quality and wildlife management, he quickly made a name for himself in his new hometown.

Only four years after its formation in 1980, the Western Sonoma County Rural Alliance, a citizens group dedicated to monitoring county general plan compliance and protecting the environment against "ill-advised" development, recruited Sharp as its chairman. He's held the post ever since.

In 1986, Sharp was asked to serve as chairman of a Sebastopol advisory committee which studied problems associated with the Laguna de Santa Rosa—northern California's second largest freshwater marsh system which flows past Sebastopol on its way to

the Russian River—and presented findings to the Sebastopol City Council. When the committee's work was completed in 1990, Sharp was asked to head the newly formed Laguna de Santa Foundation, a broad-based community group founded to protect and enhance the value of the Laguna's resources.

"Bob Sharp is a valuable resource to the entire community, not only because of his love of nature, but because of his knowledge and long years of professional experience in natural resources," says Kim Cordell, executive director of the Laguna Foundation.

Cordell credits Sharp with having a sizeable impact on the future of the Laguna, as he was one of the first to recognize its value and pushed for public ownership of the land surrounding it.

"Bob was the one who said, you really have a resource here that has statewide and national significance, it's not just a local pond," recalls Cordell.

Sharp's foresight has proven timely, according to Cordell. "Now the Laguna has statewide significance. It really has a value that goes far beyond Sonoma County," she says.

Born in St. Paul, Minn. to a family of nature enthusiasts, Sharp's love of the outdoors was inspired in early childhood: he has many fond memories of hunting and fishing with his father,

*(Please see Nature, page 5)*