

# The Carmel Pine Cone

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## Harmony has always been part of her life, but it's evolved over time

**BORN AND raised in Brooklyn during the 1950s and early 1960s, Carol Hilburn grew up enchanted by the rhythms, harmonies and romance of doo-wop music.**

"Doo-wop takes me back to the days of innocence," said Hilburn, an attorney with Fenton & Keller in Monterey. "I think of Elvis, so young, and how innocent he and our country seemed. We had come out of the Korean War. It was a tender era that preceded the Vietnam War and the assassination of President Kennedy, cataclysmic events that defined our generation."

She said that the events of the day also affected the legal profession as young men enrolled in law school to

unique. It has striking features. We came back and looked at it the next day, then returned to Dallas. The minute we got off the plane, we wanted to put an offer in, only to find an offer had already been accepted."

Because the house was being purchased from an estate, something called an overbid proceeding — basically a courtroom auction — could occur. The Hilburns returned to town, persisted as over-bidders and bought the house. They had no idea they had just purchased Harmony House, a property that would deeply involve them in Carmel's cultural roots.

Neighbors shared the history of the cottage designed and built 100 years ago by Hazel Watrous and Dene Denny, an artist and a musician who, among their many contributions, founded the Carmel Bach Festival.

Very quickly, the former doo-wop fan launched into historical research and philanthropic support of the festival. This year, the Hilburns reprised their 2012 donation of a Harmony House chamber concert.

Offered during the festival's annual gala and auction July 13, the event during next year's season will include an afternoon piano concert for as many as 20 guests by artistic director and conductor Grete Pedersen, followed by an elegant reception. It raised more than \$20,000 at auction.

For 20 years, Hilburn has also chaired the festival's musician sponsorship program.

"Through donor solicitation letters, I encourage patrons particularly interested in a certain musical instrument or performer to 'sponsor' a musician through monetary donations and time spent together over coffee or a meal," she explained. "The idea is to foster a closer connection between patrons and musicians, creating a culture of community support and engagement. This is exactly what Dene and Hazel intended in creating this festival."

But Hilburn's philanthropy isn't limited to music. Over the years, it has extended to helping children through the CHOICES program from Seattle — once offered locally — which helps elementary and middle school children understand the impacts and consequences of the decisions they make.

### Just in case

She is treasurer of the local chapter of Les Dames D'Escoffier, an organization of women in the food and hospitality industry who aim to inspire and support other women to achieve excellence in those pursuits, particularly by awarding scholarships.

"My investment in Les Dames D'Escoffier is driven by my interest in the culinary world, while my charitable purpose is educational for our members, plus providing scholarships in culinary and hospitality," said Hilburn. "Almost every year, we give a scholarship to a graduate of Rancho Cielo Youth Campus in Salinas."

Hilburn's drive to help humans is matched by her attention to animal welfare, and the couple are especially

committed to Cavalier King Charles spaniels, of which they've had three. For 15 years, Don has been treasurer of Lucky Star Cavalier Rescue, a national nonprofit that saves the dogs, primarily from puppy mills.

"When a solicitation catches our eye, we respond," said Carol Hilburn. "One of the things we do well is fundraising, supported by our donating. We have supported Peace

## Great Lives

By LISA CRAWFORD WATSON

avoid the draft — not because they were drawn to the field or wanted to practice, as Hilburn did.

She graduated in three years from the Academy of the Sacred Heart of Mary in Sag Harbor, N. Y., went on to American University in Washington, D.C., and graduated in 1967 with a degree in government and political science. She completed law school at New York University, passed the New York Bar exams, and signed on with a large securities firm as a securities lawyer.

She was later recruited by the trade association for the securities industry, which involved writing testimony for colleagues who had to go before Congress and drafting proposed legislation from 1967 to 1975, "a tumultuous time in that industry," she said

### Love is all around

While building her career on Wall Street, Hilburn was invited to interview for a job with a large company in Houston. After seeing azaleas bloom in Texas while there was still snow on the ground back home, she accepted the offer — and passed the Texas Bar exams.

"After three years, I went to work for a small law firm where, in July 1978, my colleague introduced me to his best friend and my future husband, CPA Don Hilburn," she said. They married on New Year's Day, 1979.

While visiting a friend at Fort Ord during the Vietnam War, Don fell in love with Carmel and vowed he would one day live here. In the meantime, it became a favorite vacation spot for the couple. In 1993, a realtor had them drive by a house on Dolores Street, and they decided that if they liked the interior as much as the exterior, they'd buy it.

"We fell in love with the house," Hilburn said. "It's



PHOTO/COURTESY PHOTOGRAPH

When Carol Hilburn and her husband, Don, bought a home on Dolores, they didn't know they were buying a piece of local music history.

of Mind Dog Rescue, Animal Friends Rescue Project, Max's Helping Paws and BirchBark Foundation. Nationally, we support assistance dogs provided to veterans through Paws for Purple Hearts," and contribute to many other animal welfare groups.

Hilburn retired from her law career before moving to Carmel in 2000, but she took the California Bar exams just in case she changed her mind. Five years later, feeling the need for a challenge, she went to work for Fenton & Keller. She was also on the board of Legal Services for Seniors for seven years, serving two as president.

"My advice to anyone going into retirement is to take the first five years off and devote yourself to the well-being of your community. If you feel the drive to return to work, do it then, with the same level of dedication you gave your community," she said.

Hilburn seems to have marshaled the capacity to fully commit to both.