

**San Jose Mercury News, April 5, 2010**

<https://www.mercurynews.com/2010/04/05/marcia-pagels-founder-of-sustainable-san-mateo-county-dies-at-79/>

## **Marcia Pagels, Founder of Sustainable San Mateo County, Dies at 79**

Marcia Pagels' quiet, low-key leadership helped launch the "green" movement in San Mateo County long before it was known as such.

"She was definitely a pioneer," said Ruth Peterson, a board member of **Sustainable San Mateo County, the nonprofit group Pagels founded in 1992** to tackle the area's long-term health in the areas of the environment, the economy and social equity. "She had always been a caring person about the environment and the broader concept of sustainability."

Pagels died Saturday of pneumonia at a Redwood City hospital. She was 79.

One of her earliest grass-roots campaigns involved inviting people from throughout the county to her San Mateo house to talk about reducing garbage, car emissions and energy and water usage.

"The thing that was remarkable about her was that she had a librarian-type (demeanor) and was soft-spoken but knew what she believed in and was persistent," said Ricki McGlashan, a former board member of Sustainable San Mateo County. "She was able to invite the chancellor of the community college and presidents of big companies to talk about these issues. It shows that it's all about heart."

Pagels' environmental activism most likely grew out of her artistic background as a landscape painter, McGlashan said.

"She did a lot with wildflowers," McGlashan said. "She had effusive, bright-colored paintings at her house that were tall enough to fit a wall."

Pagels' work with the Foundation for Global Community, which promotes diversity and sustainability of all life, also played a critical role in her development of Sustainable San Mateo County, colleagues said.

Pagels volunteered to coordinate and prepare foundation members to be delegates at a major United Nations environmental summit in Brazil in 1992, colleagues said. The summit inspired Pagels to put its global message of sustainability into action in her own community.

Soon thereafter, Sustainable San Mateo County was born, and Pagels spearheaded the group's most visible project, the publication of annual reports detailing the county's vitality based on various markers ranging from air quality and biodiversity to affordable housing and crime rates.

As another sign she was ahead of her time, Pagels grew an organic garden that featured drought-resistant native plants and composting.

“She was doing the right things before anybody else was,” Peterson said.

Pagels graduated from Stanford University with an art degree. She taught art in the San Mateo Union High School District and worked in several libraries at Stanford.

Pagels’ daughter, Andrea McFarland of Portland, Ore., recalls her mother “as just an amazingly determined woman. She may not know how to get from point A to point B, but she’ll get there.”

McFarland also appreciated her mom “for surrounding me and my siblings with art, music and books,” she said. “Her love of the outdoors (took the family) to every park and scenic place in California and the Pacific Northwest.”

Survivors include Pagels’ two other children, Erica Pagels, of Santa Cruz, and Chris Pagels, of San Francisco; two grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

The family is arranging a private gathering for friends and relatives. In lieu of memorials, the family asks that donations be sent to Sustainable San Mateo County, 177 Bovet Road, Suite 600, San Mateo, CA 94402.

Contact Neil Gonzales at 650-348-4338.