

# THE ARK

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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 2, 2021 | Weekend Weather: ☀ Friday 63° 53° ☁ Saturday 63° 53° ☀ Sunday 62° 55° | thearknewspaper.com

*Czech-born Shari Garay, who turned 100 over the weekend, was forced to be maid to Mengele's mistress, was a post-war smuggler, model and seamstress who just beat coronavirus*

## Centenarian survived Holocaust, COVID-19



ELLIOT KARLAN / FOR THE ARK

SARLOTTE 'Shari' Garay is seen with son Mark and his wife, Lynn, last week ahead of Garay's 100th birthday on May 29, which she celebrated at her Tiburon home with family joining locally and by Zoom.

By DEIRDRE McCROHAN | [dmcrohan@thearknewspaper.com](mailto:dmcrohan@thearknewspaper.com)

SARLOTTE DUKES GARAY WAS 23 when Nazis forced her, her mother and her sisters from their home in Hungarian-occupied Czechoslovakia and took them to the Auschwitz concentration camp. There, she was handpicked by the notorious Nazi SS officer and physician Josef Mengele, who performed sadistic medical experiments on prisoners, to serve as his mistress's maid.

Somehow, her entire family — including her father, who with the other men in her village was sent away to a forced labor camp — survived the Holocaust.

See **GARAY, PAGE 19**

## Last chance to relax pandemic rules before full reopening

By KEVIN HESSEL  
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Marin was facing its last chance this week to gradually relax pandemic restrictions on business and

social activities ahead of the state's uniform June 15 reopening, when California will eliminate its tiered county-by-county system and end capacity and physical-distancing rules in most public settings.

In his weekly update to the Board of Supervisors, county Public Health Officer Dr. Matt Willis noted Marin on June 1

See **PANDEMIC, PAGE 22**

## Tiburon will hold special election for vacant council seat

Officials reject option to make interim appointment after Kulik steps down

By DEIRDRE McCROHAN  
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The Tiburon Town Council has opted against making a temporary appointment to replace Councilmember David Kulik and will instead call a special election in November to fill the seat.

The council at a special May 25 teleconference meeting voted 4-0

to hold the special election Nov. 2, with the winner serving the remaining three years on Kulik's term, through November 2024.

Kulik resigned May 19 to move to Southern California with his family; his resignation letter to the town noted the family is dealing with a serious health issue.

Councilmembers had the option of appointing someone to fill the seat until the next general municipal election in 2022. However, they

See **ELECTION, PAGE 24**

al aramburu: 1934-2021

## Former councilmember, county supervisor had passion for conservation

By DEIRDRE McCROHAN  
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Alberto "Al" Aramburu, a former member of the Tiburon Town Council and Marin Board of Supervisors whose passion for conservation projects resulted in a Richardson Bay bird habitat being dedicated in his honor, died May 11 of heart failure in Atlanta where he was traveling to attend a family member's high school graduation. He was 87.

Mr. Aramburu began his public



Aramburu

service when he was appointed to Tiburon's Parks and Recreation Committee, now known as the Parks, Open Space and Trails Commission. The committee was

See **ARAMBURU, PAGE 23**

### holiday edition

EDITOR'S NOTE — *The Ark went into early production Friday, May 28, rather than Monday due to the Memorial Day weekend holiday. News from the weekend will appear in the June 9 edition.*

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## History, from previous

the army disciplinary barracks at Leavenworth, Kansas, as a draft evader. ...

The value of the seized estate owned by Grover Bergdoll is estimated at \$836,226. Bergdoll is cut off absolutely from his financial resources in this country. If his mother tries to communicate with him she will make herself liable to a jail sentence. If he wants his property he must return to the United States and file a claim. If he does then he must go to prison and serve his term. Every cent of expense connected with the seizure of the estate will come out of Bergdoll's pocket. ...

When Colonel Miller and his staff of assistants went to "Castle Bergdoll" and served notice that her slacker son's estate had been seized and she must vacate, she only said: "Well, when do I have to move?"

*Grover Cleveland Bergdoll was born in 1893 in Philadelphia to a wealthy brewing family. He was one of the first aviators and racing-car competitors. In 1918, he registered for the draft but failed to return for his physical. He eluded the police for two years but was arrested in 1920 and sentenced to five years in jail. The military authorities allowed him to be released under guard supposedly to recover a cache of gold he had buried in Maryland. He and his chauffeur escaped the guards and then fled through Canada to Germany, where he found refuge in a hotel in Eberbach owned by his uncle. After several unsuccessful kidnapping attempts by U. S. governmental agencies, Bergdoll returned voluntarily to the U.S. in 1939. He was imprisoned until 1944 and died in Richmond, Va., in 1966.*

### Sausalito Over Quota

Captain J. C. Cantwell, chairman of the Chinese Famine Fund in Sausalito section, says that up to June 1st there have

been received by the committee through the sale of Chinese Famine Stamps and cash subscriptions five hundred and fifty-nine dollars. This sum has been delivered to the San Francisco section of the Chinese famine Relief Committee and every subscriber may feel certain that his donation to this most worthy cause is now being used to actually keep alive some poor starving soul in the devastated districts of China.

*The American Committee for the China Famine Relief Fund sold a 3-cent stamp, based on the announced cost of feeding one person for one day. The money was sent to the northern provinces in China where famine had overwhelmed the population.*

### Condensed California News

Los Angeles — Two girl students of Los Angeles Grammar Schools, aged 16 and 13, were arrested in a department store here May 26, and, the police say, \$200 in stolen clothing was taken from beneath their coats. The girls, according to the police, say it was not their first expedition. They told the officers other girls in the public schools asked them why they did not wear silk stockings and fine clothing, and when the two pleaded poverty some of the class mates told them, they said, how they could obtain clothes without paying for them.

Los Angeles — Mrs. Bessie Cohn leaned from a second story window of her burning home last night and declined to unlock the doors for the firemen. "Go away," she called. "I can put it out myself." The firemen broke the doors down. Then they found an exploding still had started the blaze. They put out the fire and took Mrs. Cohn, the still and twenty-one barrels of corn mash and fifty gallons of home-made brandy to the city prison.

Reach historian Hillary Don at [hdon@thearknewspaper.com](mailto:hdon@thearknewspaper.com).

## Garay, from page 1

After the war, when Garay and her husband were caught smuggling goods and jailed, local authorities released them and apologized after finding a note from the Czechoslovakian president in her purse.

A survivor her entire life, she beat the odds again this January, when at 99 years old she contracted COVID-19 and spent 12 days at MarinHealth Medical Center.

On May 29, the Tiburon resident turned 100, celebrating with family members by her side at her Chandler's Gate condominium and many more attending the party via Zoom from throughout the East and West coasts and Israel.

Her longevity is particularly poignant, given what she has endured.

Before serving as Mengele's mistress's maid at Auschwitz, Garay was picked to work in a nearby factory making electronic parts because she was petite and had small hands, said her son, Tiburon resident Mark Garay. Her mother was one of the few who went into the gas chamber and came out alive: There was a mechanical malfunction and the chamber had to be shut down, she has told family members.

After the war, the family eventually returned to their hometown of Nové Zámky, which was again part of the then-young nation of Czechoslovakia and today is in southern Slovakia, less than 20 miles from the Hungarian border and about 50 from Budapest.

Back home, Garay, who goes by Shari, married one of her fellow villagers, Alex Garay, and the couple had Mark, their only child. Alex enlisted in the Haganah, a Jewish paramilitary organization, in 1948, and the Garays left for Israel. Within months, however, the Haganah was dissolved and reformed as the Israel Defense Forces.

In Israel, Alex established a fashion-design business, and the family rebuilt their lives from

scratch. He designed the garments, and Shari modeled the fashions at their studio. They remained until 1957, when they immigrated to New York City, settling at Bretton Hall hotel in an area that's now part of the Upper West Side.

Alex, who spoke little English, found a job as a tailor and pattern maker. Eventually, he worked his way up the ladder and became a successful apparel manufacturer as Alex Garay Ltd., located on Seventh Avenue in the garment district.

For a time, Shari also worked as a seamstress and then in her husband's studio, but as they became more successful, she stopped working as a model and became a full-time homemaker. The Garays moved to Forest Hills in Queens and remained there until they moved to Tiburon in 2007 to be near Mark and their two granddaughters, Nicole and Allyson.

The couple was "inseparable" and enjoyed taking day drips, Mark says.

"They were always together. They always dressed in very dapper outfits. Being a designer, look was very important to him," Mark said of his father. "They would get in the car and drive. They loved going up to the casinos in Santa Rosa."

Alex died in 2016.

To her family, Shari is known for her bubbly, gregarious personality — a social nature that may have saved her and her husband's lives, Mark said.

Back in 1947, "being somewhat naive and caught up in the moment of her engagement and upcoming marriage," Shari sent a wedding invitation to Edvard Beneš, the president of Czechoslovakia, Mark said.

"Much to her amazement, she received a hand-signed letter back from him wishing her much luck and stating that he was unable to attend," Mark said. "She cherished that letter and always carried it in her handbag."

After the war, the economy in

both Czechoslovakia and Hungary in a free fall, Alex and Shari were buying commodities, food and cigarettes in Czechoslovakia and taking them across the border by train to Hungary, returning home with textiles, Mark said.

He said they often carried cash and, although it was a hanging offense for a Jew to have a gun, his father carried a pistol for protection. On one of their trips, Mark said, the train was stopped and the police boarded looking for some smugglers.

His parents fit the description. They were escorted off the train and taken to the local station, where they were jailed after officers found the gun in Alex's possession.

While they were in custody, however, the arresting officers went through his mother's purse.

"When they discovered the letter from Beneš, they immediately released my parents with sincere apologies," he said. "I wouldn't be here but for that letter."

He keeps it in his safety deposit box.

These days, while she is still recovering her strength from her bout with COVID, Garay's life is peaceful. She doesn't walk much, but she can take a few steps with the help of her round-the-clock caregivers. She has an iPad bought for her when she was in the hospital so her family could communicate with her during her time in isolation.

Turning 100 is a little bitter-sweet, she said.

"It is very sad and lonely to be the one that remains when so many loved ones and friends have long passed," she noted in a statement relayed through her son.

However, her family is very proud of the life she's lived and of her accomplishments, Mark said.

"We respect her strength, and marvel at her vitality and spirit," he said.

Reach Tiburon reporter Deirdre McCrohan at 415-944-4634.

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