

A garden's inspiration yields top-notch video

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The Mill Valley Children's Garden is recognized throughout Marin as a success story, a testament to the value of hands-on learning. Now, a documentary video about the garden has been so highly praised at several regional competitions, that it is being considered for distribution to schools nationwide.

Appropriately titled, "*The Mill Valley Children's Garden: An Outdoor Learning Lab*," the video captures the idyllic qualities of the Edna Maguire School's completely organic herb, vegetable and flower garden — namely, the simple satisfactions of hard work. According to one of its directors, Mary Pottier of Mill Valley, the video portrays "the inspirational and romantic side of the garden." By the end of the video, the viewer learns how inspiration and romance can be crucial to erudition, which is subtly woven into the storytelling.

The half-hour production, which Pottier co-directed with Michael Mannheimer of Corte Madera, was a finalist in the Bay Area Cable Excellence Award. It received first place honors in the Hometown Video Festival for best documentary profile and, for best educational video. Most recently, "*Children's Garden*" became the "Best Documentary" at the Western Access Video Excellence Awards.

The completely organic



Mary Pottier has a lot to smile about. She and Michael Mannheimer of Corte Madera co-directed a video about the Edna Maguire children's garden which has received multiple awards and may be distributed nationally. Photo by Pivette.

garden was started 10 years ago with Buck Trust funds to train disabled adults. In the fall of 1990, when the Mill Valley School District began using the Edna Maguire site again, several parents were instrumental in continuing to support the garden. Pottier was one of them.

At first reluctant to get involved, the district eventually offered to pay for the garden's water supply.

Five years later, the garden is supported solely by student pro-

duce and crafts sales, and small grants for tools, seeds and wheelbarrows. Parents and teachers provide time and money, too. All in all, it is the students who reap what they sow.

"This is a kids' garden. By the kids and for the kids," said Pottier.

As a member of the garden's advisory board, she volunteered several years ago to document the garden's history.

"I started taking pictures and then I figured 'well, maybe

I'll just shoot some video.' It was a shock for the show to turn out as good as it is," she said.

"*Children's Garden*" captures the student's enthusiasm by incorporating a student-created rap song about composting with shots of boys and girls in kindergarten through fifth grade gracefully working with pitchforks, shovels and wheelbarrows. Though some students present their knowledge of gardening through interviews, the value of the garden is most poignantly experienced by viewers through

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the eye of a seemingly unob-
trusive camera.

"We tried to capture the essence of the spirit behind the garden," Mannheimer explained. He appreciated watching the innocence of the students' enthusiasm.

"It was kind of like eavesdropping. We captured them doing, being and learning."

Mannheimer is not a novice to working with video or children. He is the creator of another award winning program with Marin schoolchildren. Kid-T.V., which began in 1990, is a co-production of Mannheimer and students from a variety of schools that airs every Thursday at 7:30 p.m. on Marin 31. He had good vibes about "*Children's Garden*" from the onset. But, he says, "to win awards in both categories was very, very gratifying."

Mannheimer said Pottier's background as a "master gardener" was as important to the collaborative process as his background in videography.

She was trained by University of California professors through a cooperative extension program. The program's purpose is to put knowledgeable gardeners back into their communities. When she completed the requirements, Pottier knew she wanted to work at the Edna Maguire garden.

It was only a matter of time before she began brining her Hi-8 video recorder to work with her.

Pottier said she learned from the video process what she had believed all along: "The children use this as a learning lab. They learn about art, math, and nutrition... just as much as [they do] in the classroom. They can compost better than any adults."

Pottier and Mannheimer are now talking about producing a "hip gardening show". Though they plan to air it on Marin 31, they hope it can become regional or even national.

"The Mill Valley Children's Garden: An Outdoor Learning Lab" will be shown on Marin 31, December 21 at 7:30 p.m.