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Aunt Helena: Feb. 15

Thursday, February 15, 2007 7:47 AM PST

Overnight it seems our Valley is awash in glorious golden mustard, Dear Reader, a cheerful sight that never fails to lift the spirits, rain or shine.

Something else that lifts the spirits — the unflagging energy and good-heartedness of long retired St. Helena High School teacher, coach and counselor Ralph Ingols. You read in this very column not so long ago that Ralph has just published a delightful book of memories, "Back of the Beyond," and now we learn from a former student Dona Bakker that the indefatigable 95-year-old is preparing a third book. This, according to Dona, will be a tribute to the many students he came to know during his 31-year career at the high school. But Ralph needs help. He is asking that SHHS graduates from 1940 to 1972 write to let him know what they've been up to in the years since. He plans to highlight their accomplishments, their vocations, community service and families. Those wanting a questionnaire should write to Dona, 1370 Trancas St., #372, Napa, CA 94558. You may also provide the names of deceased classmates to be included in the tribute.

And the talented Sofia Harrison, who has a colorful way of combining words and glass, has her work in a show which runs through March 9 at Expressions Gallery, 2035 Ashby Ave. in Berkeley. In fact, if my eyes don't deceive me, one of her unique pieces graces the show's flyer. Gallery hours are noon to 5 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays. If you want to stop in for a chat, Sofia will be at the gallery today from 12:30 to 3 p.m.

Backyard birders, was it too wet and cold for you to join the Christmas bird count? Here is a second chance offered by the National Audubon Society and Cornell Lab of Ornithology. From Feb. 16-19 people of all ages, from beginners to experts, can take part in this event wherever they are — at home, in schoolyards, at local parks or wildlife refuges. Count the highest number of each species you see during an outing or a sitting and enter the tally on the Great Backyard Bird Count Web site. Participants last year submitted more than 60,000 checklists, reporting 7.5 million birds overall and 623 different species. The count, among other things, recorded declining numbers of American crows. From the sound of early morning cawing it doesn't sound like they're declining in the Napa Valley, but we won't know unless we get out and count! Go online to www.birdsource.org to learn more.

Just heard that Megan Murray, the St. Helena High School senior who competed in the NV Idol vocal competitions for local teens has been invited to the March 17 finals at the Napa Valley Opera House. Good luck Megan!

And Janet Pope reminds us that sign-ups are underway for all girls in third through fifth grades interested in joining Girls on the Run. Register online at www.gotrnnapavalley.org or pick up a brochure or registration form at Sportago or St. Helena Cyclery. Registration is limited to 15 girls per group and is on a first come, first serve basis. The \$125 registration fee includes 10 weeks of life skill lessons and training as well as a T-shirt, water bottle, fun-run entry fee and snacks at each session. There will be a 5K fun run May 20. Scholarships are available.

Change of date: The Young School's annual wine auction fund-raiser will be held Saturday, March 17, from 6-10 p.m. at Quintessa. Time to remark those calendars.

Finally, Aunt Helena was pleased as punch to learn that Jimmy Sweeney has been named St. Helena Boy Scout Troop 1 Scout of the Year. And Matthew Phelps was named Rookie of the Year. Huzzahs all around!