

MILT STARK AND PR/MDIA

by Mary Wilson



Milt Stark was elected the fourth President of PR/MDIA in 1999. Milt stated, "I am honored to have been elected the fourth president of PR/MDIA after Grace Pickus, Marion Hall and Beverly Roths. Frankly, Beverly's record of leadership and achievement over the past eleven years is a really hard act to follow. However, I will try to do my best, although not for eleven years!" Milt's presidential term started in 1999 and ended in 2010 – 11 years!

I doubt Milt knew how involved he would become with wildflower preservation when he bought his first single lens reflex camera back in 1969. A member of a local wildflower preservation group saw some of Milt's photos and recruited him to help the group lobby for a wildflower reserve.

In 1972 Milt began working with the Wildflower Preservation Committee, an adhoc committee of the Lancaster Woman's Club. This group campaigned to raise money to purchase the land that would become the Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve.

In 1974 Milt was part of the Poppy Preserve State Projects Citizens Advisory Committee along with Jane Pinheiro, Dorothy Bolt, Grace Pickus, Augusta and Vern Thompson and John and Nierida Henderson. Their purpose was to serve and report to the Director of California State Department of Parks and Recreation. They were to make recommendations to the Director and provide him with information with regard to the preservation and protection of rare and endangered plant and animal species to be found in the Antelope Valley. After Jane Pinheiro died in 1978, Milt was elected chairman of the group. This committee would also campaign for more funds to build the Interpretive Center. In 1976, the group persuaded the state to designate 1,800 acres of Antelope Buttes as the Antelope Valley Poppy Reserve. On April 24, 1976 the Poppy Reserve was dedicated as a state park. Jane Pinheiro was the Mistress of Ceremonies and Milt was the Master of Ceremonies. On October 24, 1979 the Director of the California Department of Parks and Recreation, gave the State Parks Foundation the green light to hire a private architect to design the Jane S. Pinheiro Interpretive Center at the Reserve. The Advisory Committee was dissolved but the Wildflower Preservation

Committee continued as a private foundation for the purpose of raising additional funds to obtain land to expand the Reserve. On May 20, 1981 the Poppy Reserve Center groundbreaking ceremonies were held to start construction of the Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve's Jane S. Pinheiro Interpretive Center. In 1982, the Poppy Reserve Interpretive Association (PRIA) was incorporated and this group had volunteer docents to run the gift shop, give walking tours on the trails and helped educate the people about the reserve.

On March 30, 1991, Milt published his first wildflower guidebook, A Flower-Watcher's Guide. He sold over 1800 copies in the first three months and the book was dedicated to the memory of Jane Pinheiro. In 1994 the name PRIA changed to the Poppy Reserve/Mojave Desert Interpretive Association (PR/MDIA). This group still maintained the gift shop and the profits were to go to enhance the educational and interpretive functions at three State Parks: the Poppy Reserve, Ripley Desert Woodland State Park and Saddleback Butte State Park. This group would later include Tomo Kahni State Historic Park and Providence Mountains, Mitchell Caverns. Milt became a PR/MDIA Board Member in 1996. In 1998 Milt's video "Flower Watchers Guide" was completed and it became part of the volunteer docents training. In 1999 Milt was elected the fourth President of PR/MDIA.

In 2000 Milt's second book, "A Flower-Watcher's Guide" came out and it covered wildflowers of the western Mojave Desert. In 2002, PR/MDIA completed a new brochure for the Reserve with all the panorama and flower photos taken by Milt. This brochure was awarded the best publication by the California League of Parks Associations (CALPA). Brochures about Jane Pinheiro and the Reserve were printed in Japanese and Korean and were available for visitors. Two burglaries occurred at the Interpretive Center and cash registers, the TV/VCR, the tape recorder and Milt's "A Flower-Watcher's Video, and lens from the projector were replaced by PR/MDIA and a new burglar alarm was installed. In 2003 PR/MDIA was instrumental in the California Poppy Centennial Celebration. This was to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the signing of the bill proclaiming the California Poppy to be the State Flower. It was also the beginning of Experimental Research with Mike Powell as the head of that research. In December 2004 the PR/MDIA newsletter, Wildflower Report, started an insert on the history of Jane Pinheiro on one side of the sheet and the second side had color

prints of some of her artwork. March 2005 a Credit Card machine was used for the first time in the Gift Shop. Micro-weather stations and soil temperature sensors were put in at the Reserve. A satellite image was paid for by PR/MDIA. A 40-foot cargo container for the Gift Shop supplies was purchased and put in the maintenance yard. In 2006 a large number of original Jane Pinheiro watercolor paintings of wildflowers were on display at the Lancaster Museum and Art Gallery. Milt gave a presentation on "Who Was Jane Pinheiro?" PR/MDIA had tried for many years to get permission from the California State Park Systems to reproduce some of Jane's paintings. With Milt's persistence in 2006 he got permission to have a set of nine note cards, some 5x6 and 8x10 prints printed and matted. His diligence also finally got a sign installed on the visitor center that reads "Jane S. Pinheiro Interpretive Center." There were three new display boards installed in the picnic area. A \$500 grant was given to 13-year-old Cindy Curtis on her research of animals at the reserve. Assemblywoman, Sharon Runner, presented certificates of appreciation to PR/MDIA and Tomo Kahni. In 2007 Milt donated a large quantity of his book "A Flower Watcher's Guide" to PR/MDIA. In 2009 the big topic was the State budget's effect on State Parks and the ability to keep them open. PR/MDIA stepped in and funded two Park Aids for up to three months during the wildflower season.

A project that was very important to Milt was the Arthur B. Ripley Desert Woodland State Park. Mr. Ripley willed the land for this park property to the state. He died in 1988 and it wasn't until 1990 that the State of California finally accepted the 556+ acres of this prime desert woodland. Milt has been involved with this project from its very beginning. He arranged for the Sierra Club members to clean up the place and in five workdays they had filled up five very large dumpsters with trash. He joined PR/MDIA to represent Ripley and he got PR/MDIA to finance the display boards and he and Ranger Bob McAdam laid out the nature trail. The Sierra Club members built the trail and Milt wrote the brochure that visitors would use on the trails. In 2005 Milt got permission to put in another walking trail and after many meetings and setbacks this trail will be completed in 2010.

Milt has also been active with the Tomo Kahni group in Tehachapi. PR/MDIA has helped pay the rent to keep the center open. On January 23, 2010 at the annual Tomo Kahni meeting, he made a power point presentation of a walk through Tomo-Kahni and gave them a dozen or so 8-1/2x11 photos of native

plants and how the Indians used them which they will display in their office. Tomo Kahni gave him a certificate of appreciation.

Milt was a photographer, a gardener, an Antelope Valley historian, a botanical researcher, a lover of nature and a people person. He was a humanitarian, naturalist, conservationist, preservationist, and activist. He didn't claim to be a botanist, but rather a photographer who is fascinated with the history and folklore of our native plants. He was also a spokesman for the natural environment and its ecological balance for future generations. How could PR/MDIA and others thank him for all he has done?