

Martin Rosen, Huey Johnson, Doug Ferguson and Robert Praetzel are four of the "Rebels With A Cause" who worked to save Marin County's open spaces. Including the Golden Gate National Seashore.



'Rebels With a Cause': Marin County's inspiring crusade

G. Allen Johnson

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The Bay Area is a natural place for a big-screen run of "Rebels With a Cause," Nancy Kelly's documentary about the beginnings of the open-space movement in the late 1950s and '60s, spearheaded by Marin County citizens and leading to the Point Reyes National Seashore and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

But how much appeal does it have outside the Bay Area? You'd be surprised.

"I had a man come up to me (at a film festival) in Cleveland," Kelly said. "He came to see it twice and was so interested. ... There's the way I see the film, and then there's the way others see it. Hopefully, it inspires people to get involved in their own communities."

Packed with archival material - including President Nixon meeting with two key rebels near the Golden Gate Bridge - and current vistas of the natural landscape, "Rebels" is nice to look at. Kelly, who has been making films in the Bay Area for 30 years with her husband, Kenji Yamamoto (her co-producer and editor), found many of the rebels still alive, including Stewart Udall, the Secretary of the Interior under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, and Huey Johnson, co-founder of The Trust for Public Land in 1972.

It also is narrated by Oscar-winning actress Frances McDormand, who happens to have a house in Bolinas.

"I knew we need a female narrator because the rebels were mostly guys," Kelly said. "Last summer I was writing the sweetest notes in my life and sending her copies of the film, and nothing. Just when we were approaching the finish line, one day the phone rang: 'Hi. It's Fran. I'll do it!'" That wasn't all of the good fortune Kelly and Yamamoto experienced in making the film.

Featured in the film is a large scale model of developers' plans for a city, to be called Marincello, a big chunk of which would have been funded by Gulf Oil. You'd think it was a re-creation by the props department, but no: Kelly and her team found the original plans in five pieces in a box in the corner of a warehouse in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

"We were carrying crowbars and hammers and passing cruise missile crates with 'cruise missile parts' stenciled on the sides," Kelly laughed. The model was in terrible shape, so she got experienced model makers - including some who had worked on the "Star Wars" movies - to repair and restore it.

"I had no doubt if they had built the project, there would have been other projects on these properties," Trust co-founder Johnson says in the film. "If they could do it once, they could do it again."

What would Marin County have looked like if it weren't for the rebels? "Like the Peninsula, I guess," Kelly said. "A lot of development, and pretty crowded."

**BIG
SCREEN**

IF YOU GO

May 31-June 6

San Francisco, Roxie Theater
roxie.com

June 7-13

San Rafael, Rafael Film Theater
cafilm.org/rftc/

Berkeley, Elmwood Cinema
rialtocinemas.com/elmwood

Sebastopol, Rialto Cinema
rialtocinemas.com/elmwood

June 14-16

San Jose, Camera 12
cameracinemas.com