

Diablo Honors.....

Joe & Michele Alioto

By Tony & Dee Geisler

Joe (Joseph Michelangelo Alioto) and Michele Driscoll Alioto bought what is now “Casa del Sol” from Leigh and Susan Freeman in 1976 to be used as a summer and weekend home in addition to their principal residence in San Francisco. In 2020 with the onset of the pandemic, Joe and Michele moved permanently to live year around in their summer home, “Casa del Sol”. Michele built a beautiful art studio at that time and works there daily. She calls it her sanctuary.

Joe, formerly a member of the St. Mary’s golf team, knew Diablo from golf tournaments. He and Michele fell in love with the potential of the nearly 2.5 acre property. Coincidentally, the structures were first built in 1926 by Herbert Hall, the man from whom his father’s client, Larry Curtola, bought Diablo Country Club in 1948.

At 50 years old, the existing buildings were in need of repair and upgrading. Joe and Michele, aided by her expertise in art and landscape architecture, transformed the property into a masterpiece by landscaping with indigenous Mexican plants, colorful tiles, artifacts and other original artwork from Mexico. She chose the Mexican motif to match the original architecture and also to commemorate the area’s Spanish grant and culture status. The children have found arrowheads buried in the yard.

Joe is a scion of one of San Francisco’s most prominent families. His grandfather, Giuseppe—an immigrant from a Sicilian fishing family, helped found Fisherman’s Wharf in 1925 including the iconic Alioto’s No. 8 restaurant which was in business for 95 years. His father, Joseph L. Alioto, followed a different career path. After graduating from the Catholic University School of Law in Washington, DC, he began a distinguished career in anti-trust law and later served as Mayor of San Francisco from 1968 to 1976.

Joe and Michele married in 1967 at St. Cecilia’s Catholic Church in San Francisco with the reception at the St. Francis Hotel.

Joe, after graduating from law school, “followed in his father’s footsteps” and owns one of our country’s leading law practices specializing in anti-trust law. Joe also is unofficially Diablo’s best dressed gentleman wearing magnificently tailored suits even when he is working at home. He says it puts him in “a better frame of mind doing his legal work.”



Joe and Michele’s 1967 wedding



Michele’s painting of grandson Nico

Michele is a professional artist specializing in oil painting and figurative art. She is a fifth generation San Franciscan and comes from the large, close Driscoll family. She is also a garden designer, a television personality and author of the book [Glorious Indoor Gardens](#). She is a member of the San Francisco Woman Artists organization and has had her work featured in various galleries. (<https://www.michelealioto.com>). She is also a commissioner and former trustee of the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco.

Joe and Michele have four adult children who follow in the family tradition of achievement. Michela Alioto-Pier is a former member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. At age 12, Michela became paralyzed from the waist down from a chair lift accident while skiing in Heavenly Valley. She and her husband are proud parents of three children husband and Michela is a noted disability rights advocate. Angelina Alioto Grace is an attorney in San Francisco, and she and her husband are vintners in the Tuscany region of Italy. They have three daughters. Joseph M. Alioto, Jr., is also a trial lawyer, and is presently Board Chairman of the California Occupational Safety and Health Standards Board (Cal.OSHA). He and his wife have two children. The youngest sibling, Alexander Alioto, is the co-founder of Whimstay, a travel tech company specializing in upscale vacation rentals. He and his wife live in Sausalito. Joe and Michele are also the proud owners of two adorable Bichon Frises, Roxy and Ruby, well known to many Diabloans.

Joe is one of eight siblings, and Michele one of seven, so in addition to their four children they have 35 nieces and nephews. As these children grew up, they married and had children of their own swelling the family to over 100.

The Alioto home has been a regular family gathering place on weekends, summers, Thanksgiving, Easter and the Fourth of July. Though the property had twenty beds, Joe remarked that “everyone slept somewhere but no one was ever sure where.” The group enjoyed golf and sometimes had family golf tournaments at Diablo CC plus tennis, swimming and just spending time together. The children grew up knowing each other well and spoke of their times in Diablo as some of their best childhood memories. Their best friends tend to be family members.



The Alioto-Driscoll first cousins



Celebrating Joe's birthday with the grandkids

In describing the neighborhood when the Aliotos moved into their house, they remembered that everyone seemed to have horses. The homes were of individualized architecture on spacious lots which gave Diablo a rural feel. There was tennis, swimming, a golf course, corral and a great facility (the Club). They also soon learned of Diablo's fabulous history.

A favorite walk of Michele's in Diablo is to the end of Alameda Diablo and to the right on Diablo Lakes Lane to a trail in Mount Diablo State Park with its abundant wildlife, which she says “we didn't get in San Francisco.” Once, she encountered a mountain lion near the trail that, thankfully, didn't interact with her.

The Aliotos are a wonderful family who are self-sufficient, productive and smart individuals. They are loyal to their family and supportive of each other. It was a pleasure to interview them and learn their remarkable history and what they love about living in Diablo.

