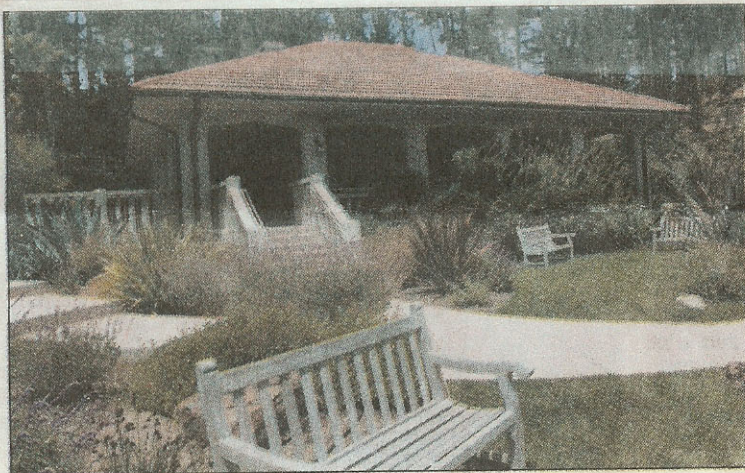


MARSHALL

Renovation gives retreat new life

The tucked-away Marconi center gets a low-key, \$1.95 million makeover, but preserves its history



McCargo Hall (left) is one of the buildings at the 62-acre retreat, which was home to the American Marconi Wireless Telegraph Co. in the early 1900s. Above, a portrait depicts radio pioneer Guglielmo Marconi.

By Nancy Isles Nation | Marin Independent Journal

THE STATE PARK that houses the Marconi Conference Center in Marshall has a history so varied its low-key presence belies its colorful past.

The original structures were built by inventor Guglielmo Marconi in 1913 as the site of the first wireless receiving stations in the United States. In the 1970s, it became the home of the Synanon cult.

Owned by the state parks system since 1984, the 62-acre retreat has just finished a \$1.95 million renovation project in efforts to become a lower-key version of the Monterey Peninsula's Asilomar Conference Grounds.

Marconi has been operated by a nonprofit organization in a conservative manner and has operated in the black since its early days.

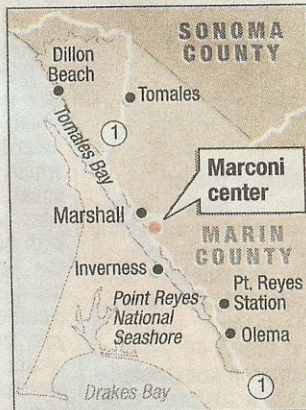
The center is reserved by universities, churches, schools, corporations and other organizations for much of the year, although business is usually slower in December and winter months. But those times can be busy as well, according to Kathy Whippert, general manager, saying many groups are repeat customers.

"We only have a limited amount

a year, much of which is spent on maintenance, operations and improvements.

Driving by, one can easily miss Marconi's buildings scattered on a hillside across Highway 1 from Tomales Bay. Because it is a state park, it is open to the public — but it has been largely undiscovered.

The property includes four historic structures built beginning in 1913 by the American Marconi Wireless Telegraph Co., and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



IJ map

KEY DATES

- ▶ **1913:** Marconi Wireless Receiving Station installed
- ▶ **1920:** Radio Corp. of America buys Marconi site
- ▶ **1965:** Synanon buys Marconi site
- ▶ **1984:** California State Parks Foundation acquires the property
- ▶ **1989:** Parks foundation turns over property to California State Parks
- ▶ **1990:** Marconi Confer-