

JUST BEING A KID

'Kiddo! Art Show'

Mill Valley nonprofit fills arts funding void, showcases children's creativity

Paul Kilduff

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With the advent of Proposition 13 in the late 1970s, budget cutbacks for the state's public school districts have long been a reality. One area where the ax fell first was arts education. But in Mill Valley, the arts continue to thrive, thanks to Kiddo, a nonprofit that has been raising money for arts programs for 25 years.

One of the fruits of this labor is the "Kiddo! Art Show -- Celebrating the Arts in Our Schools."

On display will be 38 pieces of student art and poetry culled from five elementary schools and one middle school where Kiddo funds instruction in painting, drawing, ceramics, batik and poetry. The organization also partially funds technology education, such as digital photography and other computer skills.

"We wanted an opportunity for the community to really see what was happening in the schools because of their support," says Kiddo Executive Director Trisha Garlock, who co-founded the organization in 1981. At the time, she said, her "original goal was to be out of business in five years. Guess what?"

Kiddo raises funds primarily through donations from parents of children in the district. They are asked to contribute \$600 per student per school year, which comes out to \$50 a month, but parents are encouraged to chip in whatever they can afford.

Kiddo also has a scrip program, as well as an endowment that will eventually fund the organization into perpetuity. For the 2006-07 school year, the nonprofit funded \$1.2 million worth of arts education, accounting for nearly all of the district's K-8 arts

programs.

"You think back about when you were in school, and what do you remember? I remember playing in the orchestra. I remember my fifth-grade play. The arts create joy, excitement and memories for the students," Garlock said.

There's also a practical aspect to not ignoring the arts, she added. "Kids with art do better on the SATs. Arts change lives. They can provide that spark for a child just for staying in school. They provide self-esteem and self-expression."

Also featured in the exhibition are photos documenting art in progress by Mill Valley photographer Laura Epstein-Norris.

Eight of her 37-by-52-inch photos grace the walls of the theater.

"You sort of get a feeling of kids so involved that they hardly knew I was taking their picture," said Epstein-Norris, who specializes in documentary photography of children and showed up at the classrooms unannounced. "They're very candid moments. I just popped in. I was like a fly on the wall."

To Epstein-Norris, the photos of middle school trumpeters jamming, kindergartners pairing off in dance class or a first-grader enthralled in a messy painting project capture "the magical little moments that kids have. I think the photographs are really a celebration of the moment. Now my work is sort of involving the moments of childhood that you blink and it's gone."

2-6 p.m. Tues.-Sat. Through May 31. Free. 142 Throckmorton Theater, 142 Throckmorton Ave., Mill Valley. (415) 383-9600.

www.142throckmortontheatre.com.

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