

Summer 2018

# ARTS/99

The publication of El Dorado Arts Council



Honoring Educator Paul Tomei

Divide Music Coalition

*Out There*

Images of Sky, Space, and Planets

# THIS ISSUE



Dear Reader,

The mission of El Dorado Arts Council is to promote, connect, and empower arts and culture in our county. In keeping with that mission, we are pleased to present the inaugural issue of *Arts 99*, a quarterly publication that will not only keep you up to date on our special events and important new programs, but also shine a light on the intricate, diverse, vital mosaic that is El Dorado County.

At El Dorado Arts Council, we take a broad view of artistic and cultural practices. We recognize that El Dorado County is special and vibrant because of its idiosyncrasies, its contradictions, and its diversity. Artistic and cultural expression need not be confined to the classical fine arts—in addition to theatre, dance, music, and visual art, we've included forestry, history and heritage, orchards, wineries, preservation and architecture, and literary arts in our understanding of El Dorado County's cultural life. In a farmer at work in

this orchard, we see an artist working with a different kind of canvas. In the immaculately preserved architecture of the Gold Rush era, we see a beautifully executed, centuries-long performance of a historical script.

Perhaps the title of our publication most succinctly expresses the vision of El Dorado Arts Council, the nature of El Dorado County, and the purpose of this publication. *Arts 99* takes its name from the intersection of Highway 50 and Highway 49 in Placerville, the seat of El Dorado County. But it suggests another kind of intersection: the intersections of art and culture, rural and cosmopolitan attitudes, heritage and progress, and especially the intersection of various artistic and cultural practices, ranging from forest science and wine-making to music and theatre. As 99 is the sum of 50 and 49, so too is El Dorado County the sum of multiple complementary parts, all working in concert to enrich our shared experience in this area.

## ARTS/99

**EDITOR:** Jordan Hyatt-Miller

**DESIGNER:** Caitlin Thompson

*Arts 99* was printed by Capitol Digital in consultation with Ian Reynolds, and was sponsored by Tom Sinton of Starfield Vineyards.



# DIVIDE MUSIC COALITION

The Georgetown Divide is a rural community situated between the South and North Forks of the American River. Hemmed in by rivers and isolated by distance and geography from urban centers, the Divide also faces invisible barriers: the decline of the logging industry (in concert with other factors) has triggered cycles of unemployment and poverty. Economic opportunities have slowly been siphoned out of the area. These troubles may be felt most acutely in the Divide's Black Oak Mine Unified School District, which has seen its enrollment decline 42% in the last ten years. Funding declines alongside enrollment: every student lost is equal to a \$7,000 loss in funding. Instructional materials for art and music classes are one of the first casualties of these budget cuts. As

the quality of instruction worsens, involvement and interest in the arts curriculum declines; this eventually degrades the quality of life and the appeal of schools on the Divide, which only accelerates the spiraling decline in enrollment.

The Divide Music Coalition is intervening in this cycle. Elizabeth Haines, its lead organizer, characterizes the Divide Music Coalition as a “fledgling” advocacy organization, but it is growing rapidly and has already made significant strides toward its goals. Founded in January 2017, the Divide Music Coalition aims to repair, replace, and modernize the collection of musical instruments in Black Oak Mine Unified School District. Through a partnership with Tim's Music in Sacramento, the Divide Music Coalition has already acquired dozens of quality instruments for students. It has raised \$2,500 dollars this year and, as a result of its recent inclusion in El Dorado Arts Council's Arts Incubator, it is on track to meet its \$25,000 funding goal for the whole year. Elizabeth Haines notes, “the dollars may seem small, but they go a long way.”

Still, some of their greatest successes are less tangible than dollar amounts. In particular, Elizabeth Haines notes the extent to which the community has embraced the project. The coalition has already grown to 40 active members, comprising parents, teachers, and community members. There have also been signs of a cultural revitalization on the Divide: the excitement and hope are palpable, as are the benefits for students of Black Oak Mine Unified. “Our work is not theoretical,” Haines says. “We connect our goals with real kids.”

The ultimate goal of the Divide Music Coalition is to remove all “barriers to opportunity” for students in the district. In school music programs, the financial burden too often falls on the families of students.



On the Divide, this burden can be overwhelming. By shifting that burden away from families, the Divide Music Coalition hopes to overcome a systemic lack of access to opportunity. “We want to give them a chance to succeed,” Haines says.

As an integral part of its mission, Divide Music Coalition advocates broadly for the enjoyment of music and for a culture of artistic appreciation on the Divide, seeking to nurture a community-wide foundation of support for young musicians and for culturally enriching activities. In keeping with this goal, they have already partnered with Music on the Divide, a concert series, to bring music to the people. The joy that the project has already brought to the

community is just as important as the coalition’s concrete strides toward a revitalized music program in Black Oak Mine Unified. “The Divide is filled with good, hard-working people who care about their community and their schools,” says Elizabeth Haines. All they are lacking is opportunity, which is precisely what the Divide Music Coalition is bringing them.

It may seem like a tall order to produce opportunities both for students and for the community as a whole, but as Elizabeth Haines says, “if you are positive and have ambitious goals, people rise to that.” So far, the Divide Music Coalition has every reason to be positive and ambitious, as the Divide has already begun to rise.

## Arts Incubator

El Dorado Arts Council’s Arts Incubator provides fiduciary oversight, financial management, and other administrative services to help build the capacity of cultural projects and emerging arts groups which are not 501(c)(3) organizations. Donations made to the project through the Incubator are considered charitable in nature and may be tax-deductible. El Dorado Arts Council accepts Incubator projects which have an arts and culture focus and serve the public good.

**DIVIDE  
MUSIC  
COALITION**

*Supporting Music Education  
in the Black Oak Mine Unified  
School District*

**STUDIO  
81**

SEE THE  
ELEPHANT!





# OUT THERE

Bring someone from a big city to El Dorado County and listen to them marvel at the stars. Many El Dorado County locals have come to take the visibility of the stars for granted; in the country, away from the light pollution of urban centers, it is utterly normal to behold vast, velvet-black expanses of night sky studded spectacularly with shining points of light. It is a shared experience for those in El Dorado County, but it is hardly common or universal. It is one of the many things that make us unique.

Caitlin Thompson, the curator of El Dorado Arts Council's upcoming exhibition *Out There*, says that's why images of sky, space, and planets will connect so well with people in the area. "We have one of the few dark sky spaces left in California," she says. As she's collected images of space for the exhibition, she's often thought about the intimate connection we all have to those stellar sights.

*Out There* will consist mainly of photography from local artists, and will also include some images from NASA. When selecting the pieces, Caitlin kept an eye out for images that were high quality and visually striking, because she felt that these would heighten the "sense of wonder" that she hopes visitors will feel. For this same reason, she especially liked pieces that portrayed deep space: celestial objects so distant that "you can't see them with the naked eye, even in El Dorado County."

For this exhibition, El Dorado Arts Council partnered with the Community Observatory in Placerville, which takes beautiful deep space photographs of its own. The Community Observatory is free to visit, and offers the use of its telescopes to visitors. Caitlin hopes that *Out There* will increase awareness of this fantastic local resource.

Ultimately, Caitlin wants the exhibition's stunning images of space to remind visitors that "what makes El Dorado County so special isn't just on the ground." She wants them to look up at the sky and appreciate everything that is ... out there.



Frank Dibbell. *Horse Head Nebula*. 2014. Photograph.

# Paul Tomei

## *Recipient of the 2018 Normadene Carpenter Award*

Every year, El Dorado Arts Council presents the Normadene Carpenter Award, celebrating significant contributions to the cultural life of the community. This year, in recognition of his passion and commitment as drama teacher at El Dorado High School, the Arts Council will honor educator Paul Tomei.

Long before Paul Tomei was the beloved drama teacher and lauded director of El Dorado High School's Studio 81, he was a promising student in the same program. He entered El Dorado High School as a band student, but after taking a drama class, he underwent a "transformative experience." He had

found his calling. After graduating, he continued to study theatre at California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, and eventually embarked on a professional acting career in Los Angeles. Along the way, he worked a hodgepodge of odd jobs, ranging from delivering singing telegrams to building houses (which he credits for his set-building expertise). Throughout his time in LA, he only grew to appreciate his hometown more. "I missed the grounded lifestyle of this area," he says, referring in part to the skiing, backpacking, and fishing that he was deprived of in LA.

When the position of drama instructor at El Dorado High School opened up, Paul jumped at the opportunity, and the school jumped at the opportunity to have him. He returned to his hometown, but more importantly, he returned to Studio 81: "Stepping back into that room felt like being home again."

He proceeded to build on the program that had first made him fall in love with theatre. Feeling a responsibility to uphold Studio 81's tradition of "professionalism and respect for the craft," Paul threw himself into his work, "almost to an unhealthy extent," he laughs. The hard work paid off: Paul Tomei has imprinted himself indelibly on Studio 81, El Dorado High School, and the area's artistic community as a whole by creating a new standard of excellence for high school theatre in El Dorado County. One of the most visible aspects of his legacy (and one of his proudest moments) was when the community came together to build Studio 81's amphitheater. Still, it's clear that he considers his real legacy to be his students. He speaks with obvious pride of his many former students who have found success in the performing arts. It appears that he succeeded at one of his major goals: "instilling in students a passion for being the best they can be; searching for excellence and not settling for anything less."





Paul has learned alongside his students. He continually tries new educational techniques, challenging himself and his students to “take risks.” One of those risks was a project he is particularly proud of: a play called *Tony n’ Tina’s Wedding*, which was performed in downtown Placerville and involved extensive audience participation. “It brought in the whole downtown community,” he says. He knows that his students can handle challenging, experimental projects. “They rise to the occasion.” But he also recognizes that he has to provide as much assistance as he can. “There’s a balance. Teaching is more than the subject matter. You’re a counselor, a nutritionist, a shrink.”



As a teacher, Paul wants to help his students grow into good human beings, not just good artists. He believes that “theatre is a reflection of life,” and that participation in theatre can be used to provide a holistic education to his students. He lets them “fundamentally own their choices, and makes sure to let them experience real responsibility” for something as large and important as a theatrical production. He wants to create a space for them to have “mature, meaningful experiences.” At the root of this approach is Paul’s conviction that theatre can “pose and answer important questions.” He encourages his students to grapple with, and learn from, those questions. He knows that this is hard work, so he strives to give them a sense of community along the way. “The ensemble connection is important. It encourages a family unity.”

If there’s something that Paul is as passionate about as his students, it’s the larger Placerville community. “If I wasn’t teaching, I would still be doing something for this community,” he says. In particular, he wants to see Placerville grow into an inclusive, vibrant cultural hub. He envisions a future in which Placerville is “the place where all the crossroads converge.” He feels that he can contribute as an educator and artist by expanding access to and involvement in the arts. “Sometimes it feels like culture is only offered to a certain class,” he says. “Theatre shouldn’t be so removed. Theatre is for everyone.”


Paul believes that art can unify communities and remedy social ills, and he already sees progress in Placerville. He’s been especially impressed by those artists who have brought their passion and knowledge back to Placerville to employ it in service of the community. He wants to see it happen more. “Bring your thoughts and your ideals home. We have so much to offer right here.”

Paul Tomei once brought his passion and knowledge back home, and he has no regrets. In fact, he says that it’s been the most rewarding experience of his life. “I felt I had a lot to offer, but it was reciprocal. I felt like I was receiving therapy the whole time,” he laughs. “I can’t imagine doing anything else.”

This June, El Dorado Arts Council will celebrate the second year of the Normadene Carpenter Award, which recognizes extraordinary commitment to culture and creativity, by honoring Paul Tomei. The benefit will be held on Thursday, June 7, at Boeger Winery from 6 to 8 pm. Proceeds from the benefit will support and sustain El Dorado Arts Council programs.

For more information or to purchase tickets, call the Arts Council at 530-295-3496 or visit [eldoradoartscouncil.org](http://eldoradoartscouncil.org)



A photograph of Taylor Graham, an older woman with short grey hair and glasses, sitting on a large log. She is wearing a dark green t-shirt, blue jeans, and brown boots. She is holding a white notebook and a pen, writing in it. A green and brown backpack is resting on the log next to her. The background is a lush green field with a dirt path leading away from her.

# Composing Verses With the Poet Laureate

I meet Taylor Graham, El Dorado County's Poet Laureate, at Placerville's Gold Bug Park. We have agreed to go on a nature walk. The walk was her suggestion: "I'd rather be out walking than in a building." She is no stranger to nature walks—they are both a source of inspiration for her poetry and an opportunity to train her dogs for search and rescue work. (She talks a lot about her dogs and about searches she has taken them on. Her pride in them is obvious.) As we walk, she often stops and takes pictures with her iPad. "This way I can see what was in bloom, what was growing," she explains. Taylor has a botanist's eye for the natural world: she knows many of the plants by their name, and takes an evident pleasure in turning the words over in her mouth.

It is hard to imagine a place more suited to this poet than El Dorado County, nor a poet more suited to this county than Taylor Graham. Her poetry revolves around the axes of history and nature, often at the same time, such as her poems about mineshafts, which for her are both a historical and natural phenomenon. She talks energetically of historical figures from the area: a preacher who walked barefoot all around the county, distributing literature; a learned blacksmith,

her ancestor; a native chief who got along with everyone but slave traders. Her enthusiasm for this area's history is matched only by her appreciation of its natural wonders. Stopping next to a stream, she remarks in a rapturous tone, "There is nothing like the sound of running water." Regarding both history and nature, she says that one goal of her poetry is to capture and commemorate what has passed, or what is about to pass: "With my poetry, I want to be able to say, 'this is how it was once.'"

In Taylor Graham's poetry, the nexus of history and nature is a sense of place. "I like to get a feel for a place," she says. "I can't write a poem if I don't have a place to put it." Although her earliest work was, in her words, "obscure and dark," she has since moved toward a poetry of the land, a poetry as vibrant and immediate as the grass beneath our feet. "I don't like abstractions. I like things I can see and handle." At one point, she stops and recites one of the first poems she wrote when she got to this area (she has it memorized). It is about young birds learning to fly, and as she speaks a bird twitters above our heads. I am not surprised by this coincidence; it seems only natural, given how intertwined her poetry and this place are,





that Placerville's fauna would provide such a fitting accompaniment to her recitation. "When I got here, it just felt like I was home," she says.

Taylor is a prolific poet. She composes a poem nearly every day (when she wakes up, before she has had her coffee, "when the critic is still asleep"). I learn just how prolific she is when, the very next day, she sends me a poem that she has composed about a fenced-in mineshaft that we encountered on our walk. I have reproduced the poem below; I think it is only fitting that Taylor Graham, our poet laureate, has the last word.

- Jordan Hyatt-Miller

## SAFETY FENCE

There's a poem here, somewhere  
on the other side of chainlink fence. That  
shaft, excavated by hard hand-labor –

textured layers of topsoil, roots, and shale  
cut away in search of treasure. Gold.

My kitchen could almost fit in this pit.

I'm focusing my camera lens, but  
fence gets in the way. I love the twining –  
roots or vine – across the mouth cut into rock.

I can't get at their digging – how far  
underground; the mine's secret.

What did those forty-niners find here?

A fenced-off photo fails at what the eye  
can see. At rough-cut edges, spring green  
works to lace things back together.

Layer on layer. What could a poem  
uncover, or obscure?

- Taylor Graham, 2018



# Placerville's New Winemaker

Tom Sinton, our sponsor for this inaugural issue of *Arts 99*, is a local winemaker with a grand vision. Tom wants to produce more than just excellent wine at his Starfield Vineyards estate: he wants to produce a total foothills experience, complete with live music, gorgeous scenery, tranquil seating locations, and three miles of walking trails bordered by gardens, shady trees, points of historical interest, and, of course, the grapevines upon which the winery's French, Italian, and Spanish grape varieties grow.

Tom received his degree in winemaking from UC Davis and started growing grapes in 1972 in Paso Robles, but ultimately spent his career in the tech industry. When he retired, Tom decided to pursue his original passion, opening a vineyard in Napa Valley. He moved from Napa Valley to his Starfield Vineyards estate, located just off of Smith Flat, because he felt that this area's silica-laden soil and rolling hillsides offered both an exciting challenge and an opportunity to produce superior



quality grapes. "You'll have to come to the tasting room to see how it turns out," he says. "The proof is finally in the wine."

Tom has approached the preparations at his estate like an artist, meticulously plotting the experience he hopes to provide to visitors with a devotion and eye for detail that is usually reserved for the making

of a fine painting or novel. He has modeled the vineyard on the *ferme ornée*, an "ornamented farm." He's in good company: George Washington employed the same technique at Mount Vernon. "We want to do something different," he says. "We're excited to see how people respond... We're going to adapt it to the way people want to interact with the space."

Above all, Tom wants Starfield Vineyards, which opens to the public in Spring 2019, to be a "people place," where great wine meets great experiences.

## Artist Studio Tours

El Dorado County is brimming with talented visual artists and positively overflowing with the art that they produce. It can be overwhelming to try to drink it all in. Luckily, three visual arts associations in the county are offering guided studio tours: El Dorado Hills Arts Association, Tahoe Art League, and Placerville Arts Association. These free tours are an ideal springboard for any budding arts aficionado looking to dive into the world of local visual art. With a studio tour kicking off in a new area almost every season of the year, it's easy to get involved.

Here's the schedule:

- **El Dorado Hills Arts Association:** Spring Annually. Information is available at [www.eldoradohillsarts.com](http://www.eldoradohillsarts.com)
- **Tahoe Art League:** Summer Annually. Information is available at [www.TALart.org](http://www.TALart.org)
- **Placerville Arts Association:** Fall Annually. Information is available at [www.placervillearts.com](http://www.placervillearts.com)



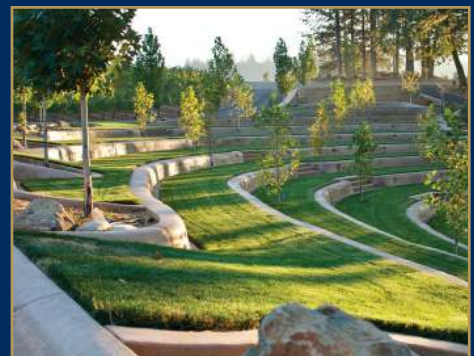
# STARFIELD VINEYARDS

**OPENING SPRING 2019**



**WE INVITE YOU TO RELAX  
AMONG THE STARS!**

Please visit our website to sign up for  
our monthly email newsletters  
to follow our winery's progress, events, wine specials  
and other exciting news.



STARFIELDVINEYARDS.COM • 2750 JACQUIER ROAD • PLACERVILLE, CALIFORNIA





Street: 772 Pacific Street  
Mail: P.O. Box 2400  
Placerville, CA 95667  
(530) 295-3496  
eldoradoartscouncil.org

Non-Profit  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Permit #1841  
Sacramento, CA

Address Service Requested

# ARTS/99

**The publication of El Dorado Arts Council**

El Dorado Arts Council's mission to promote, connect, and empower arts and culture throughout the county is achieved by targeted programs and services, a vibrant gallery exhibition series, and a focus on initiatives which support and sustain the cultural life of the region.