It was 1986. They all sat quietly in the clearing, atop the mountain peak looking out towards Sugarloaf Ridge near Kyburz. It had been a dusty hike up the hill from camp and in a few short minutes the whole group would hear it—a special gift. All fell silent, leaning in with anticipation. They all set aside the bustling activities of that earlier, hot summer day and waited patiently until suddenly it began, rising up to reach their ears on their traditional night hike...a sound from far across the canyon. It was an alpine horn, blowing a soft melody towards camp from five miles away. Campers, counselors, and staff all listened in awe and waited for it to end. Then, the campfire singing began into the darkening twilight.

This small sample of history is retold as the stuff of legend from Sugarloaf Fine Arts Camp (Sugarloaf), now celebrating its 60th year of arts education in El Dorado County. Founded in 1959 as El Dorado Summer School Camp, Sugarloaf has not only created special memories for thousands of El Dorado County students but has stood the test of time as a rare success story in arts education.

Named for a prior camp location off Hwy 50 known then as Sugarloaf Station, Sugarloaf is a local summer camp program still thriving today, offered by the El Dorado County Office of Education in partnership with the Sugarloaf Station Foundation and numerous community support groups, including Arts and Culture El Dorado. Held each summer since 1991 at the Sly Park Outdoor Education Center in Pollock Pines near Jenkinson Lake, young artists between the ages of 10 and 18 explore classes in music, theater, studio art, photography, videography, digital audio recording, dance, and textile arts.

In these 60 years, Sugarloaf has left an indelible mark upon its community and participants. Ask Sugarloaf camp alumni about the program and you are likely to hear about more than just fun and exciting opportunities to create. They describe it as a place of cherished magic, a place of support, connection, and in many ways a family. Stories are abundant about connection, challenge, support, and growth. They tell of life-changing experiences accumulated in one short week and a camp culture that celebrates play and passion, safe spaces to try new things, opportunities to meet new people and consider new ideas. In a world of increasing pressures, conflict, and uncertainly, Sugarloaf’s example of positive community has established an enviable precedent and legacy of hope.

Arts and Culture El Dorado believes fervently in the mission of Sugarloaf, and so we dedicated this edition of Arts 99 to celebrating its legacy and its future.
In 1964, the Superior California Music and Art Foundation was formed to help raise funds for a music camp in El Dorado County. This began a solid partnership with the El Dorado County Office of Education (EDCOE) and completed the process to become a not-for-profit organization in California.

In November 1967, the Foundation changed its name to the Sugarloaf Station Foundation, Inc., to be consistent with the location of the camp, which at that time was held near the site of the historic Sugarloaf Station Pony Express mail stop. The Foundation had a quiet presence for several decades until 1996, when founding board member Clara Neilsen and then-camp director Nicholas Rideout asked Paul Zappettini to become President. From 1997-2013, Paul and the resurrected board of directors provided leadership that helped the Foundation become what it is today.

In 2005, the Foundation attempted to secure a permanent home for camp at Jenkinson Lake with a collaboration that included El Dorado Irrigation District, Florence McFarlane Martin Memorial Foundation, and the El Dorado County Office of Education. A feasibility study concluded that even with the land being donated, there was inadequate financial support available to build a new camp facility. Given that financial reality, funds that had been donated for a new camp were invested with the El Dorado Community Foundation, securing a strong financial base for the future of the youth studying fine arts in El Dorado County.

At the outset, the Foundation was founded on the premise that, in a world of increasing pressures and distractions, visual and performing arts must be made a more vital, creative and rejuvenating part of our lives. While our world and our community have evolved over the past five decades, this underlying commitment still exists and the Sugarloaf Station Foundation remains a strong supporter of the El Dorado County’s young artists.

During the 2019 camp year, $21,200 was provided for students unable to attend camp because of financial constraints. In addition, $6,240 in legacy scholarships was given to campers who are achieving at an exemplary level and who model excellence in the various areas of study at camp.

The Sugarloaf Station Foundation believes that its greatest resource will always be our youth. The Foundation is devoted to continuing to create opportunities for young artists, to inspire their creativity and to allow them to interpret and perform all aspects of fine art. The board of directors and eight committees are led by devoted community volunteers, hosting several fundraisers each year that are supported by generous sponsors and donors. In addition, they hold biannual board meetings, which are open to the public, every May and November. To learn more about how to become a legacy donor or help send a student to camp, visit sugarloafstationfoundation.org.
Each year in the warm summer sunshine and fragrant pines, friends gather; campers, counselors, staff, and volunteers return to the Sugarloaf experience, located not far from where it all began. While rooted in 60 years of arts education for El Dorado County students, camp has evolved in ways that show it has changed with the times and serves local youth interests in both traditional and modern art mediums.

Yet, even with these changes, traditions have carried forward the heart, purpose, and mission of the organization. There is a solid understanding that Sugarloaf today closely resembles the experience in 1959. Much of this longevity and connection lies in written and oral histories.

At the forefront of this effort to connect current Sugarloafers with its beginnings is long-time El Dorado county resident and Sugarloaf founding staffer Clara Neilsen, 99, also known as “Grandma Sugarloaf.” Over the years, Clara has made it a point to visit camp in session and various offsite events, where she is welcomed eagerly and with open arms, nearly as camp royalty. Visiting classes, joining the camp in the cafeteria for a meal, and happily answering questions about camp history over and over, her presence and connection at camp ground the experience. She lights up the room with kindness, enthusiasm, sincerity, and a heaping amount of wry humor and charm. Clara is quick to the punchline and she inevitably gets the crowd laughing.

Clara has been with Sugarloaf from the beginning, well before camp launched in 1959. She recounts stories from those early days, when she and other local leaders began to envision what an arts camp might look like, where the money would come from, and whom could be depended on to make it happen.

In 1972 the Neilsen family made a charitable gift of camp property to the Kiwanis Cali-Nev-HI Foundation. The gift was conditioned on the property being used as a youth-oriented recreational and educational facility for the next thirty years. The Neilsens retained an interest in the property for the benefit of EDCOE; the Neilsens’ gift established the Sugarloaf Trust Fund. EDCOE agreed that the annual income generated from the trust would be given to the Sugarloaf Station Foundation for the support of the camp. For its part, the Foundation agreed to continue to help EDCOE promote, arrange, and carry on the Sugarloaf Fine Arts Camp.

In the early 1980s, Kiwanis decided to sell the property. With that development, the Neilsens gifted their interest in the Sugarloaf property to EDCOE. The transfer was made in order to affect the sale of the property and with the understanding that the proceeds of the sale of the property would be placed into a trust account to be used for the support, maintenance and promotion of youth oriented cultural art programs.

What is most evident when sitting down with Clara, through stories and laughter, through fascinating facts and details about camp origin stories, is her humble and steadfast position that it is not the work of one person alone which has made camp what it is today. She is persistent about this idea and will quickly accept accolades while simultaneously giving reminders that “we’re ALL part of this.”

From her early championing of arts education, specifically aimed at students that might not otherwise have a calling or opportunity for creative expression, to her pivotal role in building the figurative and literal foundations of camp, Clara remains a beloved leader to many, at the core of the Sugarloaf experience, keeping traditions alive that may have otherwise faded to memory.

Sugarloaf is honored to not only call Clara a dear friend and beloved partner, but to recognize her dedication to 60 years of support and vision. It is through this longevity that she is recognized as an exemplar of the Sugarloaf Spirit.

For detailed content about Clara’s roles, camp history, photos, and a 2019 video interview, visit sugarloafstationfoundation.org
Here’s the story of a deathly shy and awkward fifth grade boy, Paul Tomei, who played the trumpet and attended the “original” Sugarloaf Camp in the 70s, before it burned down. Enter into the story a music teacher at camp, Betsy Hoffman, the quintessential teacher who encouraged him to play a trumpet solo and had him stand up in the final performance at camp. Months later he remembered the sense of accomplishment and applause, and noticed that the nervous tic he’d had, was gone. His family noted the transformation in this young boy. “I did band, because I was waaaaay too shy to do drama.”

As a sophomore at El Dorado High School he enrolled in a drama class with teacher Pete Miller. He remembered Pete from Sugarloaf for his enthusiasm and positive encouragement. It was at this time that he started his life-long passion and career in theater, “a path that I would not have been able to take, had it not been for that opportunity to stand up and play my trumpet. Sugarloaf was definitely formative, and one of the reasons that I kept going on with the arts.”

Finishing his 20th year as Theater Teacher at El Dorado High School, and having taught over 2000 students, Paul reflected on how many of the students have continued to go on; he estimates that 30 or 40 students are doing theater professionally. “Sugarloaf is one reason that we have so many students that continue in the arts in this community. It’s only a week in a kid’s life but seems to have such an impact. Personally, I have seen the effect Sugarloaf and the arts has on students. The collaboration, trust, creativity, and expression they learn, which is a challenge these days, it’s so refreshing and beautiful. The arts have such an influence when it’s in the right people’s hands. This county has some great teachers.”

“In high school I could not think of anything but getting out of Placerville. And now I can’t think of anything that I would rather do than be right here. Now that I have my son Leo who is five, it is beautiful to know that growing up in this community, he can have that experience of Sugarloaf too. It is more special to know that this will be available for him.”
What Sugarloaf Has Meant to Me – Alumni Stories

Heidi Kling

“Although it may be hard to believe, I was quite shy and insecure entering high school. Our family moved up from LA and I attended a small, private school for middle school. Knowing no one except a few kids I met at Sugarloaf as an 8th grader, I entered EDHS, and drew upon social skills I learned from moving every few years, and I slowly made new friends at a big public school in a strange rural town. I did okay, but didn’t thrive until my mom encouraged me to sign up for drama class. Working with Pete Miller and the crew of Studio 81 changed my life. I got a job at Sugarloaf as a counselor, where I met more friends who were like my high school drama friends on fire: charismatic, unique, daring and wild. I knew when I stumbled upon the group playing music in the warm forest, I’d found forever friends. My spirits soared. I was hooked on the feeling!

“I worked at camp one more summer, before moving to Santa Cruz where I attended UCSC and upon graduating started my own children’s theatre. We ran a theatre there for a few years before moving to New York where I earned my MFA in Creative Writing. I’ve written many books for teenagers, and direct my own children’s theatre to this day. Without Sugarloaf, I doubt any of this would be part of my current life. This year, our 16-year-old son attended Sugarloaf for the first time. I hope it will change his life for the better, the way it did mine. Thanks, Sugarloaf!”

Shelby Ganzert

“I was a 7-year camper at Sugarloaf and tried my hand at many forms of art throughout those years. I was exposed to mixed media, pastels, charcoal, graphite and painting in the Art major and minor. I worked with my hands in the Crafts minor nearly every year. I learned to sew, crochet, and batik in the first years the Textile major was offered. I began toying with photography in the Black and White Film Photography major and continued my exploration to the Digital Slideshow major. At the time, this was all just a fun way to pass the time in the summer and see friends that I only got to see once a year at good old Sugarloaf Station. This was my artistic outlet that I only really did once a year, then it was back to school where I focused heavily on rigorous courses and considered myself a “math and science person.”

“My studies in high school landed me at UC Davis where I started as a biomedical engineering major. For the first year and a half of college I took chemistry, biology and calculus courses. This was my first summer without Sugarloaf and something was missing. I was miserable taking this workload and didn’t realize that I hadn’t done any art, made any friendship bracelets, or sang a campfire song in over a year.

“When I took my Intro to Design class at UC Davis on a whim for some humanities credits, it clicked. My college peers were confused when I changed my major to Design. They only knew the logic-based, number-crunching Shelby but I knew this was always me. My years at Sugarloaf had cultivated an artist with an eye for symmetry, color, balance and meaning. I graduated from UC Davis with a degree in Design, focusing on graphics and web. I know that without this camp, I would not have ended up where I am. It’s not only a great way to spend time with new and old friends and a quirky place with a warm culture; it could be the start of your future as a musician, designer, artist, photographer, audio technician, actor, actress, singer, or dancer. It was for me.”
Lucy Carluccio

PROLOGUE: I had always been drawn to the theatre, but was never confident enough to pursue anything. I had heard of EDMT and IT, but the diverse age range and talent of the people involved in it deterred me from even going near those companies. When my best friend Erin came back to school after spending a week at a camp I’d never heard of, the stories she told of Sugarloaf filled me with an overwhelming excitement and I told my mom to sign me up as soon as she could. A year later, my first week at Sugarloaf began, and I was hooked.

SCENE 1: I am panicking in the middle of my Drama audition, sweating as I desperately try to remember the second half of my monologue. I’m confused because I had been reciting it over and over on the drive up to camp (sorry, Mom) and hadn’t forgotten any part of it then! As I’m standing there with my mind completely blank, I am shocked when my theater teachers start clapping. They tell me I am doing great, to relax, and to start over. Their kindness radiates throughout the room, overwhelming me. I am renewed, composed, and ready. I can do this? I can do this. I do this. That academic year, I sign up for a drama class and realize that the theatre is truly what I love. I sign up for Sugarloaf every year following.

SCENE 2: It is my sixth and final year of camp. After remaining a Drama major but changing my elective every year, I have decided to spend my last week at camp as a Photography major. I get to walk around camp taking pictures of Sugarloaf, my home and my family, documenting the love that only grows stronger throughout the week. That academic year, I sign up for the Yearbook class and win a national award for a photo I took. I am doing this.

SCENE 3: I have finished my first year of college and am not having the greatest time. I remember the strength of my Sugarloaf family and am drawn to become a counselor for the first time. I have the best week of my life. Camp reminds me of not only what I can do, but how happy I can be. I return to school and decide to double major in Business Administration and Theatre.

EPILOGUE: Sugarloaf has impacted my life not only in helping me find my passion in the arts, but in helping me grow stronger in every aspect of my life. This camp is a place where I am 100% myself 100% of the time. With the Sugarloaf Spirit, I am free to live without fear of failure or judgement, a freedom I never would have known existed. Now I am willing to try new things, meet new people, and do things I never thought I could. Thank you, Sugarloaf, for being my home.
Mapping our Sugarloaf Generations and Shared Histories

Sugarloaf is much like a family, in the way participants share common experiences, record histories, connect year after year (some for decades), and the ups and downs of shared living. Over the next year, Sugarloaf will be documenting and exploring its family histories even further, and in many cases these connections extend to related families, with many spanning generations at camp, creating Sugarloaf legacies.

The first part of this family series connects with The Musker Family. Susan Musker and Leah Musker

Susan Musker

"Because I grew up at Sugarloaf, beginning in 1959 at the age of 3 months, it is difficult to choose a favorite memory or story. I have held many roles since then, but was first a “Sugarbooger,” a name we use today for the children of staff members. Camp was and is truly a life-long family tradition. We have all been involved along the way. My dad John Pratt was a camp founder in 1959 and Camp Director for many years. My mom was an art teacher and Sugarloaf supporter and my brother and I campers and staff members. I have been a camper, Storekeeper, Junior Counselor, Senior Counselor, Head Girls Counselor, Child Care Provider, Dance Teacher, Crafts Teacher, and Textile Arts Director. In the 70’s, I was a member of the Sugarloaf Student Council.

“My most life-changing moment happened at Sugarloaf when it was held at Sugarloaf Station, near Kyburz. Camp was truly a family affair. My dad was the Camp Director at the time and much to his disappointment, another camp was scheduled to begin on our final program day. While neither camp director was very happy about the situation, they made it work. Before the final program, I was helping to move supplies from the camp kitchen and noticed someone as I was carrying things out. His name was Dave and he was a tall, very good-looking guy, carrying things in for his camp! We struck up a conversation and learned that we were both in college at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. Fast-forward almost 40 years and Dave and I have played duets together many times over the years at Staff Talent Night which are memories that I treasure. The past few years I have had the privilege of sharing the last campfire tradition of a solo flute being played while everyone looks up at the stars and reflects on the week. This year my mom passed that tradition to me. I can’t imagine my life without Sugarloaf each summer. As we say at camp “Sugarloaf’s in my heart!”

Leah Musker

“Growing up, I was lucky enough to be able to spend at least one week at Sugarloaf every year. First as a Sugarbooger, then as a camper, and now as a counselor. This week out of my summer is always filled with the sounds of camp. When I was little my mom Susan and I used to set up our tent right outside the staff building and the lower band area. I remember waking up and hearing the band teachers warming up on their instruments and playing throughout the day. Eventually we began camping on the back road and I remember hearing Dave Green playing his flute from the staff building throughout the week and at the end-of-the-week campfire. I have warm memories of my mom playing flute duets in the cafeteria during rest time after lunch. I was so fortunate to have this week of summer filled with all of these people sharing the arts together each year.

Over the years I learned flute in school and played each year at camp, except for one when I decided to try art. My mom and I have played duets together many times over the years at Staff Talent Night which are memories that I treasure. The past few years I have had the privilege of sharing the last campfire tradition of a solo flute being played while everyone looks up at the stars and reflects on the week. This year my mom passed that tradition to me. This is such a special memory and tradition that I can share with her because of Sugarloaf, and I have become an advocate for the arts and arts education in the state. I’ve started my journey to be a music educator, and learned how important creating art and sharing that space with others is for people of all ages.”

Do you have a Sugarloaf story to share? Sugarloaf is looking for stories from the community and encourages everyone to submit at www.sugarloafalumniclub.com.
On the final Saturday morning of camp, last-year campers are invited to say farewell. For most of them, the summer before their senior year of high school is the last time they will spend a week creating art under the trees in Pollock Pines, California.

They stand before two hundred of their peers, counselors and teachers, and do their best to express how important Sugarloaf has been in their lives. Some of them have attended camp all seven years they have been eligible. Some of them are first-year/last-year campers. They put their arms around one another and fight tears just the same.

It’s a tough task for a 17-year-old, to stand in front of a crowd at 8:00 am after an exhausting week and articulate the impact that camp has had on their lives, and guess as to how it will shape them. Some stumble through, some are concise, some read from notes, but they all take their moment to say something.

Their sentiments are brief, but familiar to anyone who has been at camp on the final Saturday morning:

- “There is nowhere on earth like Sugarloaf.”
- “You can be yourself - and love yourself - at Sugarloaf.”
- “Sugarloaf made me who I am today”
- “Take Sugarloaf out into the world with you.”

At Sugarloaf, kids willingly detach from technology for a week so they can focus on art and build relationships with one another. No one is afraid to take risks and try new things because there is a supportive community cheering them on every step of the way. You want to try singing in front of people? Go for it. Reading your poetry out loud for the first time? Please do.

At school students are asked to accept and tolerate one another for who they are. At Sugarloaf, students love and celebrate one another for who they are. Sharing a space with two hundred strangers for a week creates an irreplaceable appreciation for one another. For that short period of time, adolescent anxiety and self-consciousness wash away. Everyone has permission to let their guard down and just play.

At the heart of Sugarloaf is an unwavering commitment to the benefits that art can have on a person’s life. While the arts help audiences and viewers make sense of the world around them, they also happen to help artists make sense of themselves along the way.

In the midst of budget cuts and collapsing VAPA programs, it is a unique blessing for El Dorado County to have a place like Sugarloaf where young people begin to believe: I matter, my passions matter, and the world is a better place because I am a part of it.

Art teaches us how to value one another. But more importantly, perhaps, to value ourselves.

Saturday morning with last year campers is a bittersweet graduation: an acknowledgement of this lesson. Where young adults stand in front of their teachers and peers saying “I value the influence you have had on my life, Sugarloaf. Thank you for believing in me.”
Every summer, a variety of experienced and new camp staff dedicate a week or two out of their busy lives to work at Sugarloaf. While the occasional staff member is new to the experience and may not have attended as a student, most were once campers themselves and bring with them years of memories in class, activities, and performances. This understanding serves as a foundation for new students coming through the program and creates a layered, multi-generational bond between staff and student. While much has changed over 60 years, the core experiences, routines, and class structures remain largely the same...a camper experience in 1983, for example, would not have been much different from the experience in 2013, save some logistics in the camp location and advanced technologies. Stories, traditions, and Sugarloaf camp legacies run steadfast and deep.

For many staff members, they come back year after year because of these connections. Each summer, the average staff experience hovers around 15 years. Then there is the “Sugarloaf 30+ Club” – those active staff members who have attended Sugarloaf for 30 years or more. With a combined 300+ years of experience between them, they are largely responsible for the constancy of camp and preserving its rich traditions, while providing guidance, mentorship, and a hearty presence, while humbly recognizing that the success of camp is not just measured in years. Sugarloaf is a camp of respect and togetherness, whether it’s someone’s 30th year, first year, or somewhere in between. Each person is welcomed equally and contributes their unique experience to shape each summer session in both tradition and fresh perspectives.

Yet at this 60th anniversary marker, these long-term camp staffers deserve a special nod for their dedication and service, along with each staff emeritus who meets the criteria but is now retired and/or celebrated in memorium.

Visit www.sugarloafalumniclub.com beginning this fall for expanded staff profiles.

While many current staffers started attending camp over 30 years ago (and a few up at the original Sugarloaf Station prior to the camp fire in 1981), only a handful can officially count 30+ years “on the hill.” Below are the 2019 staff members who have celebrated 30+ years.

Susan Musker 49  
John Echols 45  

Scott Comer 43  
Rick Jones 40  

Lori Stone 35  
Jennifer Aguilar 34  

Erin Dealey 33  
Anna Alley 32
Annual Fundraiser

60TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Location: Cameron Park Community Center
2502 Country Club Drive
Date: September 28, 2019
Time: 4:30 - 9:00 pm
Tickets: $60 Get Tickets: sugarloaf60.brownpapertickets.com

SUGARLOAF STATION FOUNDATION

WINTER CAMPFIRE

Saturday December 28th at 7:00 pm
El Dorado High School, Studio 81

Join Sugarloaf for an evening of entertainment which will delight the entire family.
Featuring Sugarloaf staff, alumni, and campers.

Tickets will be available at SugarloafStationFoundation.org in October.

SUGARLOAF STATION FOUNDATION

Sugarloaf is a fine arts camp in the Sierra Nevada mountains, offering a lifetime of friends and education in music, art, drama, photography, video and dance.

Sugarloaf Fine Arts Camp brings a unique camp experience to the students of El Dorado County who are entering 6th - 12th grades. The week-long sessions provide a supportive environment for campers to expand their fine arts skills and to experiment with new ones.

To learn more about Sugarloaf Fine Arts camp or to sign up for camp please see sugarloafcamps.org.

Dr. Ed Manansala, County Superintendent of Schools
Brian Dezzani, Camp Director
Andy Johnson, Camp Director
Arts and Culture El Dorado’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.