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ARTS/99

The publication of El Dorado Arts Council

Resilience: An Artist Residency

Applecore Collective

Veterans' Voices in
South Lake Tahoe

THIS ISSUE



Dear Reader,

Several of the topics covered in this issue share a theme: creation, growth, and wellness. The life cycle of a plant, or the dynamics of an entire ecosystem, present themselves as obvious analogies. There is the burgeoning Resilience Project, only just taking root in the woods of Camino; the blossoming Applecore Fringe Festival, already bearing fruit even sweeter and more nourishing than its namesake; the expanding Veterans' Voices Writing Workshop, whose fertile ground nurtures the restorative seeds of the literary imagination; and the opening of El Dorado Arts Council's pop-up performance space, the very first flower of a germinating cultural district.

These topics are linked by their contributions to the health of our community. This issue may be an opportunity to meditate on our own growth and wellness. It may spur us to involve ourselves more actively in El Dorado County's thriving cultural ecosystem. If nothing else, it is an opportunity to appreciate the artistic bounty within the bounds of this county—the abundance and vibrancy of all the new growth surrounding us.

ARTS/99

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Veterans' Voices Writing Workshop

Expands to South Lake Tahoe

El Dorado Arts Council's Veterans' Voices Writing Workshop is expanding to South Lake Tahoe. The expansion represents the latest phase of the program's years-long development. It originated as the brainchild of Moira Magneson, former Program Coordinator at El Dorado Arts Council, along with several other veterans and community members, in response to the "22-a-day" movement, which drew awareness to the national epidemic of veteran suicides. The program started out small, but it has grown rapidly as its members actively promote the program through word of mouth and the distribution of anthologies produced through the Workshop.

Andrew Vonderschmitt, the Program Manager at El Dorado Arts Council, sees the Workshop as a unique, essential service in El Dorado County. "It's really the only program of its kind," he says. Noting that veterans make up approximately 10% of El Dorado County's population, Andrew emphasizes the importance of bringing veterans together in a "fun, creative" community. Indeed, the workshop has already created strong social ties and reduced the sense of isolation that some of the participants feel. One veteran even said the workshop gives her a reason to leave her house. Andrew thinks the program is so effective and popular with veterans because "it has therapeutic value, but it isn't therapy." While a writing workshop can undoubtedly address PTSD, depression, and many other issues facing veterans, it does so organically and informally by providing a creative outlet and a community of like-minded individuals.

For Andrew, the expansion to Tahoe is the logical next step. The program is geared toward reaching as many veterans as possible, which is one reason the Workshop is completely free. South Lake Tahoe has a large concentration of veterans who might find it difficult to attend the Workshop in Placerville due to what Andrew calls "the granite curtain"—the massive distance between Placerville and Tahoe. "We are the arts council for the

entirety of El Dorado County," Andrew explains, adding that he wants to see even more veterans in the county benefit from the Workshop. The Placerville workshop has around 15 fully active members—"that's 15 lives we've influenced," Andrew says. By expanding to Tahoe, he hopes the Workshop can increase that number.

The expansion has been made possible by an increase in funding from the California Arts Council's Veterans in the Arts initiative, which also provided the original funding for the workshop. The expansion has also been enabled by the enthusiastic involvement of Kim Wyatt, a Tahoe-based writer, artist, educator, and publisher, who will be teaching the Workshop in South Lake Tahoe.



APPLECORE COLLECTIVE

One year ago, the hues of autumn had only just begun to settle over the foothills when Placerville found itself transformed into a lively, expansive theatre festival. For two weekends, a panoply of performances - furnished by artists from San Francisco, Chicago, New York City, Nevada City, Humboldt, and Placerville itself - awaited the viewership of bands of cheerful theatregoers strolling from one of the well-lit pop-up venues on Main Street to the next. From a kid-friendly clown show at Studio 81 to a hilarious, poignant, and edgy one-man monologue in the Totem Courtyard, audiences were treated to the kind of artistic experience more commonly encountered in New York or San Francisco. It was a successful inaugural year for the Applecore Fringe Festival.

For most people, it might be enough to simply replicate the magic of that first year, but Gavin Sellers, creator and director of Applecore Collective, has been treating the first year as merely a first step. He wants to “bring arts of all forms to Placerville,” and he wants to do it year-round. Some early additions to the Applecore Collective year-round program include a flower crown workshop, a pottery workshop, a series of outdoor movie nights on Main Street, and a series of stand-up comedy nights. In the future, Gavin hopes to help at-risk populations, especially at-risk youth, by providing free workshops, open-mic nights, and other opportunities for creative expression. “Ultimately I see it becoming something like a community arts collaborative: a space where people can gather and feel safe and feel like they’re part of a Placerville culture.”



As he expands Applecore, Gavin will also have to scale up his unique approach to the challenges of running an arts organization in Placerville. The major issues are logistical. Wary of burdening Applecore with massive financial obligations, Gavin has developed Applecore as a “floating company,” a decentralized collective that finds physical spaces through community partnerships. Keeping costs down allows him to make Applecore Collective as financially accessible as possible to as many people as possible, which is a crucial aspect of his project. It also lets him avoid compromising his artistic integrity: “I’m not picking shows just to get people to buy tickets.” The partnerships are symbiotic; private businesses such as Totem Coffee, Boeger Winery, and Placerville Flowers on Main are promoted by the venues and resources they provide to Applecore. Gavin has also received crucial financial and organizational support from El Dorado Arts Council, which has included Applecore Collective in its Arts Incubator program.

Douglass Truth in his award-winning show *Death Herself*
Photograph by Gavin Sellers

For Gavin, the major appeal of a fringe festival is the original, unconventional nature of the shows. “It’s a forum for original work,” he explains. “It’s a more passionate experience. You’re seeing someone share their own work, often for the first time.” Gavin feels that the “fringe” aspect of a fringe festival is especially important in a town like Placerville, which does not have an extensively developed arts culture. “Art can be intimidating, because it seems stuffy and formal... I want to take the formality out of it and make it accessible.”

Many of the attendees at last year’s festival told him that they had never seen a theatrical production before. “That’s an asset and a challenge,” he says. It’s the reason he wants to do the Applecore Fringe Festival specifically in Placerville. “In New York it would just be one more thing. In Placerville, it has the potential to change Placerville.” He feels that Placerville audiences, who perhaps have not seen a great deal of theatre, may be more equipped to understand and engage with edgy, challenging art than the more jaded audiences in New York or San Francisco. “Audiences here have an unobscured perspective... They’re unsaturated. They have integrity, honesty, and openness.” He hopes that those qualities will make it easy to achieve one of his major goals: “getting people in our community excited about art.”

In Gavin’s ideal world, Applecore Collective would not just develop a “thriving arts culture” in Placerville, but would also strengthen the bonds of community more



Gavin Sellers
Photograph by Lauren Elle Jaye

generally. “I want to see people engaged in their community... I want to bring people together, and give people something to look forward to.” As a “safe space for expression,” Applecore can function as an infusion of creative energy for Placerville’s culture, invigorating everyone in the community—as long as the community continues to buy in. “The biggest thing about Applecore is just showing up,” he says. “I just want people to see it.”

For more information visit facebook.com/applecorefringe.



RESILIENCE: AN ARTIST RESIDENCY

Nestled in Camino, at the edge of the El Dorado National Forest, the Institute of Forest Genetics houses an arboretum, several cabins, and a team of researchers dedicated to the study of our forests. It will soon play host to something quite different: an ambitious, cross-disciplinary arts and education program centered on the evocative concept of “resilience.” Organized by El Dorado Arts Council, the Resilience Project will house resident artist Kim Abeles in an IFG cabin, where she will work with the students of Independence High School to develop an artistic project that examines and reflects the idea of “resilience” in all its complexity—as a scientific phenomena, as a philosophical concept, and as a way of living. Once completed, the students’ work will be publicly displayed in Placerville.



Kim Abeles

Photograph by Wayne Shimabukuro

The Resilience Project began to take shape nearly a year ago, when Terry LeMoncheck, the executive director of El Dorado Arts Council, conceived of a project that would fuse the worlds of art and science (especially the science of agriculture and forestry), producing a fruitful

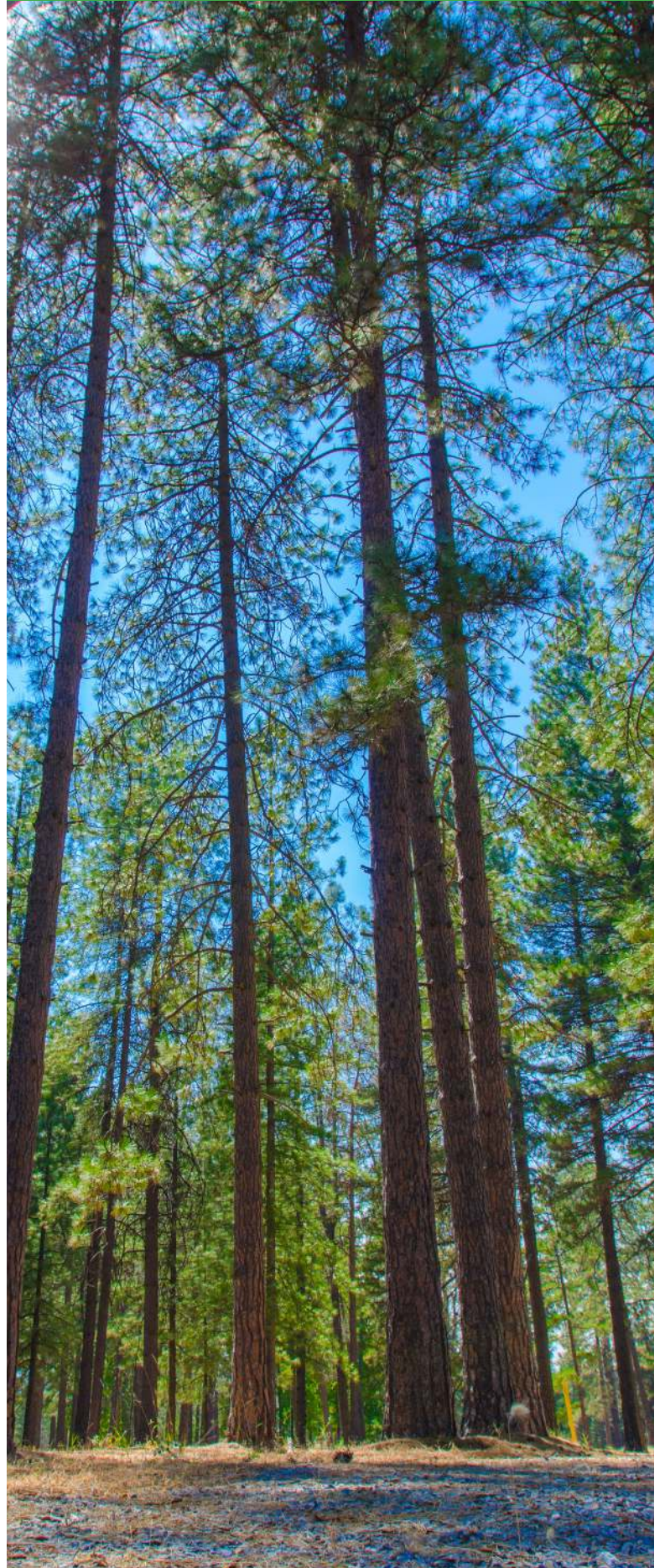
dialogue between the two disparate fields. Upon visiting the IFG, Terry was captivated by the idea of resilience, which is the primary focus of the IFG’s researchers. She was struck by “the urgency of these issues in our area—water, fire, and tree mortality.” She felt that a collaboration with the arts program at Independence High School, headed by Jen Tomei, would be especially fitting for the Resilience Project: “It’s a group of young people for whom resilience is particularly important.” Then she sought out Kim Abeles, an internationally renowned artist whose process-oriented “social practice” provides an ideal medium for the open-ended artistic exploration at the heart of the project.

Throughout its development, the project organized itself around three of El Dorado Arts Council’s guiding principles: the organization should create a bigger tent for what art can do in a community; it should actively deliver services to the community; and it should allow people to experience the arts in a way that might not have occurred to them before. The Resilience Project undoubtedly reflects these principles.

Terry’s final step was securing funding for the project. She submitted a proposal to the National Endowment for the Arts, imbuing the application with the authentic enthusiasm she felt for the project. Although she was confident the project addressed many of the NEA’s target areas, such as emphases on non-traditional, “cross-sector partnerships” and underserved communities, she also knew that a successful proposal is “more than just a great idea—you have to back it up... you have to make it come alive on the page.” Evidently, the NEA shared her enthusiasm: in an exceedingly rare endorsement of the proposal, the NEA granted El Dorado Arts Council the full amount of funding it had requested. With supplementary financial support from El Dorado Savings Bank, the Teichert Foundation, and the Society of American Foresters, the Resilience Project became a reality.

The project is now in the hands of artist Kim Abeles, whose one-month residency begins this fall. Kim's prior work has embedded her in a diverse set of marginalized communities; these communities are both her audience and her artistic collaborators, participating in the creation of art that addresses their own lives. Most recently, she has completed a project with incarcerated women who were being trained as firefighters. "I'm a strong believer that art is a wonderful way to translate complex, intimidating information," Kim says. "I want to give people a way to feel it rather than just think it." Kim's collaborative, community-based work, which is called "social practice," is not outcome-oriented; although there is always a finished product at the end, her work is just as much about the process of creation and learning, the exchange of information between her and others, and the mutual growth they experience.

Kim has already started that collaborative process for the Resilience Project. At an IFG seminar, Kim learned about the way a focus on "resilience" has supplanted "management" and "control" for forest researchers, reflecting an emerging paradigm that treats humans not as separate from nature, but as intimately involved in it. The researchers she spoke with already see the value and potential of her work: "We don't know how to tell our stories," one scientist told Kim. In addition to working with the researchers at IFG, Kim is particularly excited to work with the students of Independence High School. "The students will go through a learning process in tandem with me," she says. She expects that the students will teach her just as much as she teaches them: "They will be my guide for this project." Above all, she wants the students to join her "on a journey of self-exploration and discovery." As always, the process will hold as much value as the finished product. "Success is in the process... not necessarily a specific outcome," she says. "That itself is a lesson in resilience."



Eddy Arboretum at Institute of Forest Genetics
Photograph by Caitlin Thompson

Confidence Lab

This September, El Dorado Arts Council will introduce a new attraction to Main Street: The Confidence Lab, a dedicated space for temporary “pop-up” arts projects, including installations, student works, play readings, live music, and other activities. The space will occupy the bottom level of Main Street’s historic Confidence Hall, and will be managed and programmed by El Dorado Arts Council in a public-private partnership with the City of Placerville.

Designed to enliven downtown Placerville, the Confidence Lab will feature compelling artistic projects that are as entertaining as they are enriching. For its maiden voyage, Confidence Lab will host theatrical performances during the Applecore Fringe Festival in September. In the future, it is hoped that Confidence Lab will be joined on Main Street by an ensemble of new spaces dedicated to the cultivation of arts and culture in El Dorado County. Together, these spaces would constitute a Cultural District in downtown Placerville, a project that would preserve and celebrate Placerville’s rich history while simultaneously propelling Placerville into a new era of artistic expression and cultural engagement.

The Confidence Lab is merely the newest tenant of Confidence Hall, a building that has housed everything from fire engines to city council members over the last century and a half. Built in 1857, and rebuilt in 1860 following a fire, Confidence Hall, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, is one of Placerville’s most recognizable and beloved historic buildings. Beginning its life as the home of the eponymous Confidence fire engine, the building later hosted Seventh Day Adventists, county fairs, and the police department before becoming the Placerville City Hall in 1902. Since the 2005 relocation of City Hall to its current Center Street location, Confidence Hall has been awaiting the next phase of its historic life. As it always has in the past, Confidence Hall will once again play a vital role in the Placerville community when the Confidence Lab opens in September.



Confidence Building
Photograph by Caitlin Thompson

FEATURES

There's a new face at the Mountain Democrat: Laura Newell, Mimi Escabar's handpicked replacement for the position of Features Editor. Laura is a graduate of El Dorado High School, and briefly worked as a general reporter for the Mountain Democrat before being hired as Features Editor at the Folsom Telegraph. She says that returning to the Mountain Democrat and to El Dorado County is "like coming back home." She loves the area: "This county is such a breath of fresh air. People smile and say hello, the beauty of nature is all around me, and the feel of small town friendliness is so wonderful."

As Features Editor, Laura Newell is the conduit through which much of the community accesses information about Placerville's social and cultural life. "I love highlighting our community's local talent and ultimately making people smile," she says. Although she cut her reportorial teeth on "hard news," she thinks it's just as important and valuable to report news that can "brighten someone's day." Laura especially wants to cultivate "a variety of faces, events, and experiences" in the pages of the B Section, giving people "a fun section to read and, hopefully, learn from." When it comes time to decide what stories will make the cut, Laura thinks of what the community wants and needs to hear. "I try to imagine myself reading the Mountain Democrat with my cup of coffee."



Laura grew up playing music, and retains "a deep respect for the art community as a whole." She wants to indiscriminately highlight the contributions and goings-on of the art community in Placerville: "I don't think there is a limit to the art community. I think a middle school band performance and an art show on Main Street deserve equal coverage."

So far, Laura's tenure at the Mountain Democrat has been an ideal experience. "I have been so happy since starting at the Democrat... I enjoy going to work everyday and

I love knowing that each day a new story is going to begin." As she continues to develop the features section, she hopes to make it a true reflection of the community. "Simply said, I work for the reader. If the reader is not happy with the section, I am not happy with the section." She encourages the community to provide her with any feedback they might have: "I need the community's help to send in story ideas and calendar items to keep the section creative, full and diverse."

Contact Laura at lnewell@mtdemocrat.net or (530) 344-5081.

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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.