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ARTS/99

The publication of Arts and Culture El Dorado

THIS IS WHERE WE ARE

THIS ISSUE

Dear Reader,

This issue features a variety of voices, each of them speaking from, to, and for a sense of place.

Stephen Meadows, the 2023-2025 Poet Laureate of El Dorado County, captures in his poetry the nature, history, and spirit of Gold Country, with a particular emphasis on Georgetown, where he lives.

Arts and Culture Alpine County (ACAC) starts a conversation within its borders about the value of the arts and the civic identity of Alpine County; in so doing, ACAC draws on its ongoing dialogue with El Dorado County and Arts and Culture El Dorado, whose mentorship is helping it become established.

Marya Osucha, Exhibitions Curator for Arts and Culture El Dorado, contributes a personal narrative describing the origins and themes of Switchboard Gallery's latest exhibition, *Sending It: Climbing El Dorado*, which in turn collects and focuses the voices of generations of local climbers in order to explore the history, culture, and geography of Strawberry.

The Camino Roundabout is slated to receive a sculpture that depicts the essential character of the Apple Hill community.

These emplaced voices are put in conversation with each other in these pages. Together they form a polyphonic narrative of El Dorado County, a story of place told by many voices.



ARTS/99

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COVER IMAGE Silhouette of climber on Sugarloaf, 2022.

Photo by Marc 'Petch' Pietrolungo



A DESIGN FOR APPLE HILL

A recently constructed roundabout in Camino will soon receive a finishing touch: a new sculpture from local artist Terrie Bennett. The sculpture—an artful rendering of an apple—represents an exercise in community self-definition and an elegant exploration of the culture, economy and values of Apple Hill. Locals and visitors alike will be able to appreciate the sculpture, which is planned to debut in Fall 2024, just in time for Apple Hill season.

Terrie Bennett, whose studio is adjacent to the roundabout, planted the seed for the project when she approached Wendy Thomas, Camino resident and District 3 County Supervisor, about the possibility of a public art installation at the center of the roundabout. To bring the idea to fruition, they formed a committee of Camino residents and merchants, whose members include Terry LeMoncheck, Executive Director of Arts and Culture

El Dorado; Paul Bush, owner of Madroña and Rucksack Vineyards; Charlie Downs, a renowned architect; and Crista Campbell, owner of Rainbow Orchards.

The committee’s proposal emerged from a process of focused community engagement; Terrie Bennett’s final design, an apple depicted in negative space, represents a synthesis of ideas and input generated by community meetings and surveys. This input also resulted in a new tagline, “Camino, From Farm to Family.”

For committee member Terry LeMoncheck, the sculpture is an example of public art at its finest. “We think it will be a statement about Camino’s identity, which is part of the purpose of public art. Merchants and residents in Apple Hill are excited about it.” LeMoncheck also notes that the location of the sculpture is an important element of the

project. “Many cities around the world have sculptural elements at the center of their roundabouts,” she explains. “Having a sculpture in our roundabout puts us in dialogue with other places that are doing interesting things. And it’s a perfect place for a sculpture, because it will be seen by almost everyone who visits.”

Located centrally, just off Highway 50, the apple will be seen by motorists from every direction as they circumnavigate it on the roundabout. Due to the negative space at its center, the sculpture will also act as a frame for everything that surrounds it, a lens through which to view Camino from different angles, a common context for each perspective.



Beginner's Mind

by Marya Osucha

The genesis of this exhibition, *SENDING IT: Climbing El Dorado*, lies with Charlie Downs, a long-time rock climber and the architect of many of our community's cherished public buildings. Charlie moved to this area precisely for its proximity to quality climbing areas and superb ski slopes. Throughout the course of his career, he designed many of the schools where our children spend their days, shared spaces where we spend our leisure time, and community facilities that play host to some of our region's most valuable public services. In a way, we can thank the granite cliffs, peaks, crags, and spires that feature in this exhibition for shaping much of our built environment.

To plant the seed of Sending It in fertile soil, Charlie pulled together a group of some of the most experienced climbers, many of whom made First Ascents of well-known routes. My introduction to rock climbing – its history, culture, and community – was in the cozy attic room of Squirrel's store in

Strawberry, tucked in the shadow of Lover's Leap, a renowned climbing area right off Highway 50. Old guidebooks with hand-drawn maps and dog-eared pages were passed around like yearbooks at a school reunion. The enthusiasm and the common bond among these folks were apparent, and I was drawn in by their description of what binds them together. One phrase stuck with me from that first meeting, spoken by local legend Aidan Maguire: "We've all been humbled, and we've all been scared," feelings that are, evidently, tempered by trial and triumph.

At some point in the month following, Charlie decided that I needed to experience a climb for myself in order to have the right frame of mind to curate this show. I agreed, eager to push my own boundaries and always hungry for the new experience. I talked a good friend of mine, who is herself a climber, into coming along, knowing that her presence would put me at ease and give me confidence.

Petch, of Lover's Leap Guides, generously agreed to lead me up a beginner's route on Lover's Leap. From below, I looked straight up the rock face, searching out obvious hand and foot holds, slowly realizing that I'd be expected to use only a running crack as my means of ascent. I watched Petch shimmy up the route like it was nothing, while I puzzled



Bart O'Brien on Robert's Crack, Phantom Spires, 1988.
Photo by Pierre Ambromowski

over where I should even begin. Charlie stepped in and patiently, calmly talked me through how to jam my feet and hands, how to use physics to my advantage (even it seems to defy all animal instinct), and how to keep pushing through. With quite an effort, I made it up to a natural ledge, sitting near (clinging to) a massive Sierra juniper that jutted dramatically from the rock face. I decided I had reached my top – not the top, but my top, and higher than I expected to make it in any case.

What Charlie had suspected was true; attempting a climb myself was the only way to experience the chemical cocktail that soaked my brain over the course of that day. Facing down my own instinctive



8th Grader Bliss Stargaard on her first multi-pitch, Currugation Corner, Lover's Leap, 2017. Photo by Thomas Stargaard



Petch establishing a new route on Eagle's Buttress, Lover's Leap, 2023. Photo by Nolan Van Herk

fear of heights and then the dopamine rush that came with having done so: scared, humbled, relieved, stoked.

Sending It: Climbing El Dorado, which runs from November 16 to January 28 in Switchboard Gallery, is an ode to the granitic landscape whose beauty draws so many of us here, and to those who see only possibility in its vertical expanses. To my mind, rock climbing is where human smallness, vulnerability, and impermanence meet the measure of time that stones and mountains keep. Climbing is a sport that invites human innovation and ingenuity; early climbers like Yvon Chouinard learned blacksmithing so they could design and fabricate the gear they needed to climb better and higher, while preserving the quality of the route for future generations. New gear and new designs continue to expand the sport's accessibility and ease. Finally, climbing is about stories, human relationships, and community. I've been engrossed in the many stories that El Dorado County's climbing community has generously shared with me over the past few months. Their stories and passion have opened my eyes to new ways of seeing the land around me, and the way my community relates to it.

- Marya Osucha, Exhibitions Curator

Ron Vardanega at Buck's Bar, 2019. Photo by Charlie Downs



THROUGHLINES: El Dorado County Poet Laureate Stephen Meadows

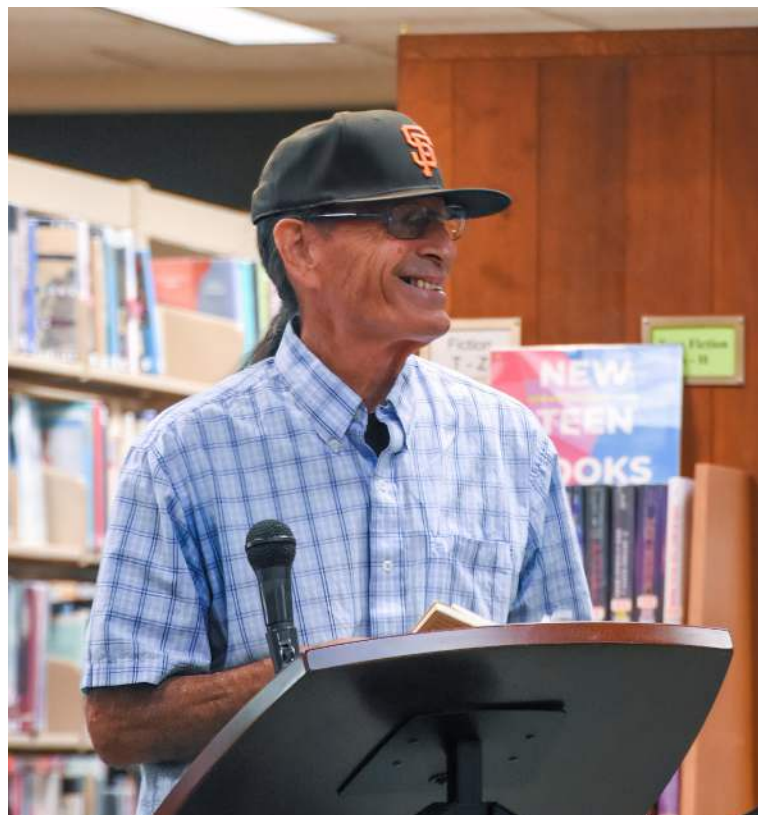
“One side of my family,” says Stephen Meadows, “has been here since the Gold Rush. And the other side has been here much longer than that.” For Stephen Meadows, a Georgetown-based poet who was recently announced by Arts and Culture El Dorado as the 2023-2025 El Dorado County Poet Laureate, his Ohlone and Pioneer heritage binds personal history to the history of California, of its lands and its peoples. It also animates his poetry, which is also the stuff of history and heritage—or it is the voice of history, the pulse of a living heritage.

Stephen was born in Carmel, California, and raised in New Monterey, right above Cannery Row, whose residents were famously featured in the writing of John Steinbeck. (Perhaps unsurprisingly, Stephen cites Steinbeck as an early and enduring influence). After attending U.C. Santa Barbara and U.C. Santa Cruz for his bachelor’s degree and San Francisco State for his master’s, Stephen embarked on an eclectic career befitting a peripatetic poet. Between stints as a ditch digger and educator, Stephen found the time to work at Santa Cruz Coffee Roasters long enough to have a roast named after him—Steve’s Smooth French. After meeting his wife, Karly, over thirty years ago, Stephen and Karly settled in Georgetown, which had long been a second home for Stephen due to family ties to the region. No matter the place or occupation of the moment, the throughline for Stephen was always poetry, a lifelong passion that has yielded two books of poetry and hundreds of published poems.

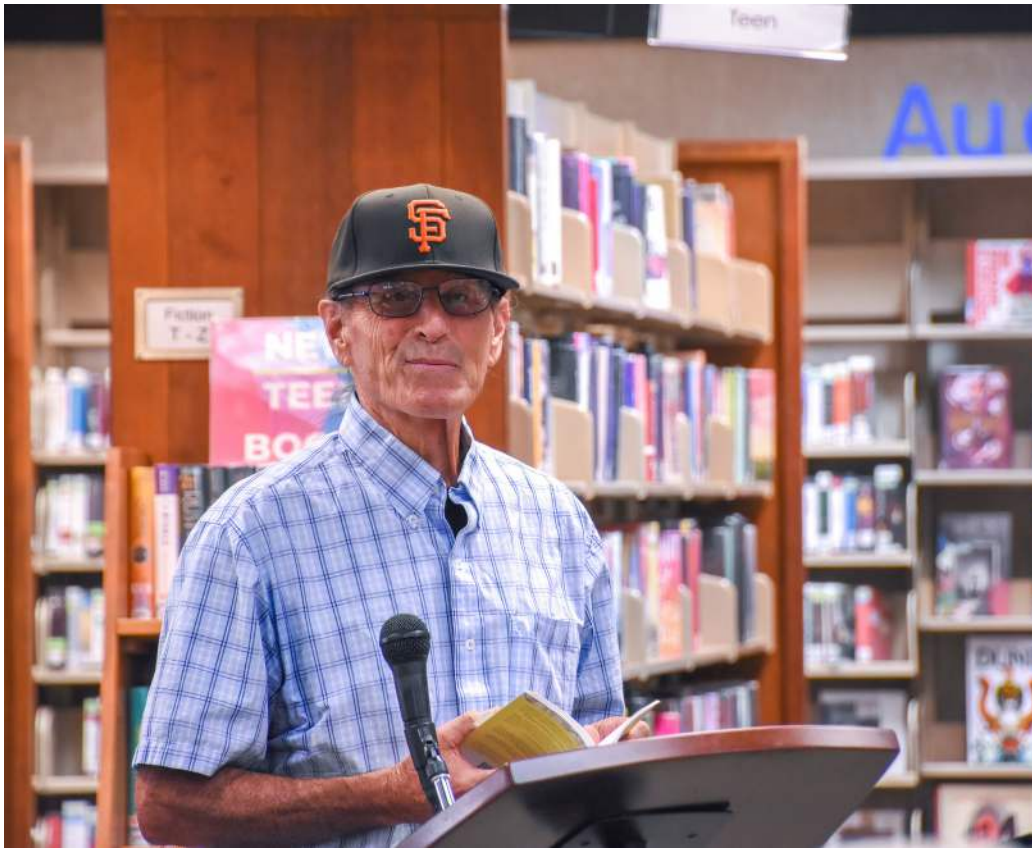
Although Stephen loves Steinbeck and has tried his hand at prose fiction, it was always poetry that captured his attention. “I’ve found that I get a bigger thrill from bringing a large image down to its essence. It is a distillation of language,” Stephen says. That distillation can’t be forced to come; instead, he has to wait for it to appear unbidden, then capture it. “Usually, a first line will pop into my

head, and once that happens, I’ve got to grab a pencil and follow that first line,” Stephen explains. “Then the rest of the lines just roll in, one after the other.”

The Georgetown area offers Stephen a great deal of inspiration. There are its breathtaking natural wonders, which he explores on hikes and long drives with Karly. There is its proximity to locations such as Placerville, Sacramento, and the Bay Area, where he often reads poetry. And there is its remarkable community of creatives and fellow poets who are actively engaged in their communities. “The poetry scene here has been very good for me. I’ve met a lot of people, like Taylor and Lara, who I never would have otherwise,” Stephen says, referring to two former El Dorado County Poets Laureate, Taylor Graham and Lara Gularte. “I’m delighted to be in that group of people,” he adds.



Stephen Meadows giving a poetry reading in Placerville Library



Stephen Meadows giving a poetry reading in the Placerville Library

As Poet Laureate, Stephen sees an opportunity to continue strengthening the El Dorado County community. “I think poetry ties people together. It brings our connections alive,” Stephen says. “I’ve always felt that humans are really in need of poetry, especially in the modern age.” While any poetry will do—reading it, writing it, speaking it, listening to it—Stephen has a particular affinity for poetry in performance. “Readings are a poet’s only way of getting out there. It makes folks understand that poetry is not just something in an old book, gathering dust. I’m sure jazz musicians feel the same way—when you go to a jazz performance, you see that these are people making something new out of something old.”

For Stephen, what is old is evergreen, as seen in the deep wellsprings of inspiration he finds in California history and his own heritage, but his focus is as much on the youth and their future as it is on his own past. Every Poet Laureate develops his or her own poetry project, forging a unique connection with the community and acting as an ambassador for the literary arts. For his project, Stephen hopes to give El Dorado County students early opportunities to create and appreciate poetry, equipping them with the tools and, ideally, the passion to enjoy a lifelong relationship with literature. It is here, at the intersection of past and future, the collision of self, history, and community, that

Stephen locates the purpose of his poetry: “I want to be remembered as someone who recognized the beauty of this state and the power of words for our communities.”

To learn more about past and present El Dorado County Poets Laureate, please visit ArtsAndCultureElDorado.org/poet-laureate

Laureate Trail

Laureate Trail allows the public to join the El Dorado County Poet Laureate on a literary tour of the county. The Laureate is joined by local poets, Poetry Out Loud winners and special guests at El Dorado County Libraries in each district in the county for free poetry readings and events.

**To learn more visit
ArtsAndCultureElDorado.org/laureate-trail**



There are 58 counties in California. Fifty-four of them have an entity that serves as the countywide arts agency, known as a State-Local Partner (SLP) to the California Arts Council (CAC). As a result of a grant from the CAC's State-Local Partner Mentorship Program, and through the efforts of Arts and Culture El Dorado, the designated SLP of El Dorado County, as well as the inspired community organizing of residents and organizations in Alpine County, there will soon be a 55th State-Local

Partner:
Arts and Culture Alpine County (ACAC).

Beginning in 2021, after Arts and Culture El Dorado became the only SLP in California to be selected as a Mentor, Executive Director Terry LeMoncheck and Special Projects Manager Marya Osucha went to work in Alpine County. They identified and built

relationships with key stakeholders, such as the Alpine County Chamber of Commerce, and oversaw a campaign of meetings with constituents, advocacy efforts, and community organizing. An arts organization was formed; they decided on a name, a slate of proposed programming, and a roster of board and staff members. Arts and Culture Alpine County has received initial funding from the Board of Supervisors, and in October they applied for non-profit status. On October 21, they held their first public event: Art in the Park.

"Alpine County was emerging from a difficult time," LeMoncheck recalls. "There had been two major fires and several severe snowstorms that had driven tourism down. Local leadership told us that this was a perfect time to start elevating culture and the arts in Alpine County. As a community at a turning point, they were looking for a new direction, and a local arts agency can be the beginning of that next chapter."

Similar to El Dorado County, whose "granite curtain" separates the Western Slope from the Tahoe Basin, Alpine County is a region divided by its geography. During the winter months, this division is entirely literal; the communities of Markleeville and Bear



Valley become inaccessible to each other, their connecting roads rendered impassable by snowfall. LeMoncheck, already familiar with the power of the arts to build bridges in El Dorado County, hoped that an arts organization could do the same for Alpine County. “We like to say that the arts create connectivity,” Terry explains.

With the establishment of ACAC, the arts will not only build connectivity within Alpine County, but also between Alpine and El Dorado, neighboring counties with overlapping, interrelated experiences and priorities. The connection between mentor and

mentee may be the template for those connections. “There will always be an open dialogue with Alpine County, which is emblematic of the whole SLP network,” LeMoncheck affirms. “It’s very exciting, and I am extremely proud of the work that we have done.”

As so often happens, the mentee has already become the mentor in at least one sense. “Alpine County can be an example to us,” LeMoncheck explains. “They have a really positive attitude about starting a new chapter for their community, and I find that really inspiring.”

ACAC LOOKS AHEAD

Shortly after organizing and executing a successful inaugural event in Alpine County, ACAC Board Member January Riddle is already looking to the future. “We’ve got a lot of ideas for programming,” she says. Some possibilities: Family-friendly educational events, such as an ecological film festival with experts in attendance to answer questions from kids; Community tours of local artists’ studios; Outdoor arts creation and appreciation events that would combine hiking with plein-air painting; and Membership for local artists in an ACAC collective.

Whatever form ACAC’s future programming takes, January wants it to emerge from partnerships within the community. “The community has been so supportive of ACAC, and some of the other organizations are really excited to partner with us,” she explains. With this foundation of “interconnectivity”, January hopes that ACAC, once it has a physical location, will become a community hub. “We want to be seen as a place where artists, residents, and visitors can come to us for support and for community... I’m looking forward to reaching more artists and enlisting them to help form this organization. I love that person-to-person interaction.”

**You can learn more or donate to Arts and Culture Alpine County by visiting:
ArtsAndCultureElDorado.org/acac**



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COLORS FROM THE FARM

Third-graders learn about
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LAUREATE TRAIL

Poet Laureate's literary tour of
El Dorado County

THE BIG READ

Countywide book talks, oral
histories, films and more

SWITCHBOARD CONNECTIONS

Poetry events in
the Gallery

PUBLIC ART MASTER PLAN

Community-driven plan for public art in Placerville

CAMINO ROUNABOUT BEAUTIFICATION

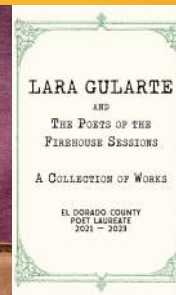
Sculptural element for traffic circle

POET LAUREATE CHAPBOOK

Published chapbook of works written during Poet Laureate tenure

CREATIVE CURRENTS

Interviews of local creatives for monthly Mountain Democrat column



ARTS INCUBATOR

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cultural projects

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Philanthropy ripple effect

VETERANS' VOICES ANTHOLOGY

Collected writing from the Workshop



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