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# ARTS/99

The publication of Arts and Culture El Dorado

## CONCEPT STRUCTURE SPACE

CONFIDENCE & EMIGRANT JANE BUILDINGS - LEVEL 01  
FLEX SPACE - THEATER & DANCE REHEARSAL SPACE, OPTION 1

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## Dear Reader,

This issue features builders. See the Elephant invites the community to co-construct “Closer to Home”, a play about the experiences of queer/ LGBTQIA+ youth in a small, rural town, and to build, in the process, healthier, more accepting spaces for queer people in our region. Arts and Culture El Dorado, the City of Placerville, and Architectural Nexus begin to renovate two historic buildings on Placerville’s Main Street, the first stage of a project that will restore important elements of Placerville’s heritage and preserve them for future generations. Justin Sawyer erects a monument to El Dorado County’s wine region with Veraison, a monumental sculpture of a cluster of grapes.

Art is not eternal, but it need not be short-lived, either. To build is to create, but it is also to preserve, to bequeath to posterity. We hope that these stories will be an occasion to think about our legacy and about future generations—to consider not just what we make, but who we make it for and the lasting impact it will have.

Thank you for your support.

# Poetry on Stage

## Poetry Out Loud returned to the stage in El Dorado County on February 1, 2024, with dazzling recitations from four gifted students, each representing a local high school.

The competition had been held in a virtual format since the pandemic, making this year’s competition the first in person County Finals since 2020. Poetry Out Loud, a national poetry recitation competition for high school students, is administered in El Dorado County by Arts and Culture El Dorado in partnership with the California Arts Council.

Poetry Out Loud has a profound impact on the students who choose to participate. Beyond their exposure to a rich literary heritage, collected in the Poetry Out Loud anthology from which they select their poems, the students also get the opportunity to engage with poetry outside of the classroom, which situates the poems in a fresh, vibrant context. The act of recitation recasts poetry as an embodied art form rather than an abstract object of contemplation, igniting a lifelong passion for poetry in some students.

The students' recitations were judged by a panel of respected community members:

- Peter Wolfe – Co-Founder and current Artistic Director of Imagination Theater
- Stephen Meadows – El Dorado County 2023-2025 Poet Laureate
- Charlotte Higgins - Novelist, essayist, and playwright
- Lori Parlin - El Dorado County District IV Supervisor
- George Turnboo - El Dorado County District II Supervisor

Union Mine’s Gabrielle Garlick took first place and went on to represent El Dorado County at the California State Finals. Oak Ridge’s Alivia Chen took second place and was the runner-up for the State Finals; Charter University Prep’s Megan Murdock took third place, and El Dorado’s Grayson Laffin took fourth.

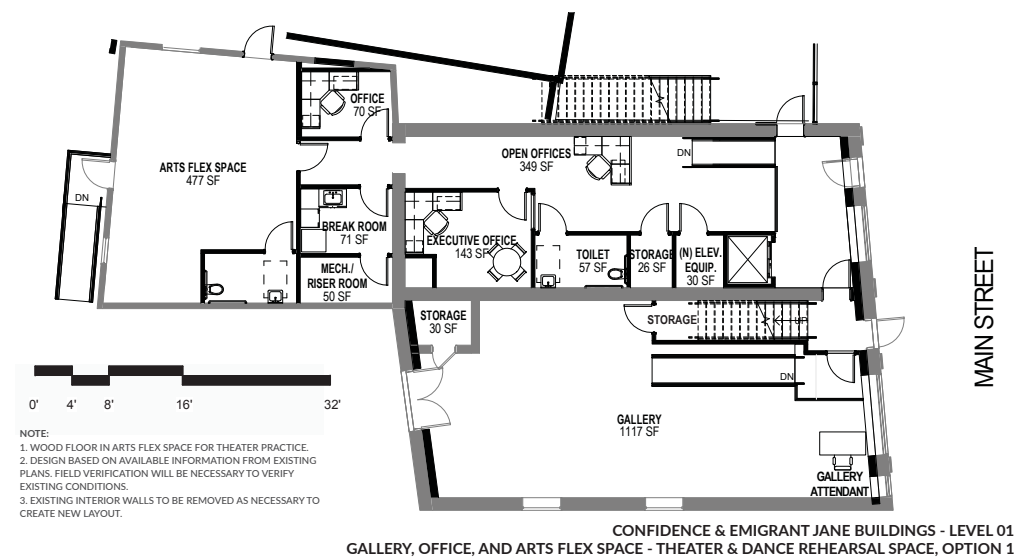
At the State Finals in Sacramento, held March 17-18, Gabrielle Garlick finished as one of 5 finalists out of 51 total competitors from counties across California.







community first requires saving them. The first phase of the renovation project, therefore, will be to stabilize the buildings, a critical process that Arts and Culture El Dorado is currently raising funds to support. For Victor, stabilizing the buildings isn't just an architectural necessity, it is a civic responsibility: "In some communities, buildings are left to become more and more derelict. That says something to the people around it: that they're not important, or that the facility isn't important enough to worry about. A project like this can increase vitality in the community."



Once the crucial first step of stabilizing the buildings has been accomplished, work will begin on converting them into community spaces. With their historic edifices preserved and protected, their interior will be repurposed for the benefit of future generations through a practice known as adaptive reuse. Artist live-work spaces, a gallery, a community "flex" space, and offices for Arts and Culture El Dorado will be created inside the buildings; down the street, in the Old Telephone Company building, the Center for Arts and Agriculture will be established. "The Cultural District will weave arts experiences into the agriculture and forestry of the region and benefit local artists and artisans, Main Street merchants, and residents and visitors alike," says Terry LeMoncheck, Executive Director of Arts and Culture El Dorado.

As these historic buildings become the centerpiece of a thriving cultural arts district in the heart of Placerville, they will form a bridge between Placerville's vibrant history and its even brighter future, bringing heritage to life in our community.

# Renovating for the Future

With the signing of a fundraising agreement between the City of Placerville and Arts and Culture El Dorado, the process of restoring two historic buildings on Placerville's Main Street has begun.

Confidence Hall and the Emigrant Jane Stuart Building, known affectionately as Ketchup and Mustard, were constructed in 1857 and 1861, respectively; in the years since, they have housed and served Placerville residents as firehouse, City Hall, and public library. Placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982, the buildings have a long, rich history, but for several years their future has been uncertain—until now. Through a partnership between Arts and Culture El Dorado, the City of Placerville, and architectural firm Architectural Nexus, the buildings will be renovated and returned to civic life, forming the center of a Historic Cultural District on Placerville's Main Street.

Victor Burbank, Senior Principal at

Architectural Nexus, is spearheading the architectural portion of the renovation project. Victor will bring to bear not just decades of experience as an architect, but also a deep commitment to both community and sustainability. "As an architect, one of the biggest things you can do for sustainability is find a new life for an existing building," he explains. Currently, the buildings are not just unused—they are imperiled by failing foundations, walls, and roofs. Finding a new way for the buildings to serve the

**"These buildings are knitted into this community. They have a historic place in Placerville... This project will provide a fantastic, rehabilitated space with new uses for the next hundred years."**



# Bringing Us 'Closer to Home'



Casey Ellis

See the Elephant, a theater and dance company in the Sierra Nevada foothills, is at work on a new project: **“Closer to Home”**, a performance that will capture the experiences of queer/LGBTQIA+ people in Placerville.

The performance will be, in a sense, by and for the community that it depicts, as its material will be drawn from the real lived experiences of generations of queer people in the region.

“Closer to Home” was made possible by a California Creative Corps grant. An initiative of the California Arts Council, California Creative Corps provides funding directly to arts organizations for work that creates awareness around one of several themes: public health; water and energy conservation and climate mitigation, emergency preparedness relief, and recovery; civic engagement; and social justice. See the Elephant, one of the cultural organizations in El Dorado County to receive funding, has already put the funds to use in the community, hiring local artists Gavin Sellers-Norman and Casey Ellis to join the project alongside See the Elephant founders Jamie and Tiffany Van Camp. “Jamie and I keep saying that this is a dream come true—that this is the type of thing we had envisioned when we started See the Elephant in 2018,” says Tiffany Van Camp. “One reason is because our two dear friends and longtime collaborators—Casey and Gavin—are able to take creative leadership.”

Gavin and Casey, who have relevant experiences of their own as queer people raised in Placerville, form the center of a larger cohort of participants and co-collaborators. “Closer to Home” has already hosted one community event, the Queer Family Re(you)nion Gathering, which had roughly 80 people in attendance. This event, the first of several, is an opportunity for the project to gather experiences and stories for the performance, but it is also a space for connection and expression,

its impact on the community part and parcel of the larger goals of the project. “People we speak to often say they feel disconnected, isolated, that they lack a sense of community,” says Tiffany. “Through events like these and the project at large, we want to begin creating those webs of connection and ultimately help folx feel safe and embraced in their own community.”

**“Closer to Home” pays particular attention to the rural character of Placerville and its surroundings, seeking to explore the ways that identity and place interact—the frictions, tensions, and contradictions in the experiences of queer youth in the region.**

“LGBTQIA+ people are not new to this town. Their history is deeply rooted, and yet nearly invisible. How can we re-write this narrative?” Tiffany asks. Bigotry finds its targets in every age group, but young people are especially vulnerable to bullying and harassment—and especially susceptible to the psychological harm that follows. Through their conversations and listening sessions in the community, the team working on “Closer to Home” has come to understand that “home is not a safe place for many, but a place where they’ve felt rejected.”

“Closer to Home” is a response to



Jamie Van Camp, Tiffany Van Camp, Casey Ellis, Gavin Sellers-Norman, Daniel Sellers-Norman



that sentiment. “The title has layers of meaning,” Tiffany explains. “This is our home—we want to feel at home, come home, be safe at home. But some of these topics ‘hit too close to home’”. The final impact of the project may be that queer youth in the community will feel closer to their hometown. Perhaps, as queer experiences become more visible, and as the community learns from this performance and others like it, Placerville may also become a place that feels closer to a home for queer youth. “Success for this project is for LGBTQIA+ people in Placerville and surrounding localities to feel seen and heard, to have strong points of connection with one another, and to feel that we have nudged the needle in the direction of a healthier community,” Tiffany says.

Visit [seetheelephant.net/closetohome](http://seetheelephant.net/closetohome) to donate and learn more.

See the Elephant is a partner in Arts and Culture El Dorado’s Arts Incubator.



# A Monument *to* Wine Country

Justin Sawyer, a local visual artist, musician, event producer, and practicing drag queen, is doing something big - monumental, even. *Veraison*, Justin's new project, is an enormous sculpture of a grape cluster, which will be displayed at Burning Man before coming home to the foothills for permanent installation. Artworks of *Veraison*'s immense size are referred to as "monumental sculptures"; indeed, *Veraison* will be a monument to El Dorado County's wine country and the artistry of winemaking, a supersized cutting from the vine of our region's wine culture, planted in the desert.

Justin, who was born in Florida before moving to Northern California in his twenties, found his inspiration for *Veraison* in the course of his work as a wedding planner. For one wedding, he built several grapes for a "giant floating botanical installation" using the steel bands from wine barrels. "As soon as we made it, I just thought, 'we can do something bigger with this'", Justin recalls.

The idea paired well with his growing interest in recycled and sustainable materials and his longstanding love of wine, particularly from El Dorado County vineyards. Before moving to the area, Justin and his husband, Clint, lived in Sacramento; they would frequently visit El Dorado County because, he says, "the wines here are fantastic." He has since worked with dozens of local wineries, as well as with Table



Justin Sawyer

Nectar, a catering company that creates gourmet food and wine experiences for its clients. "I've always drunk a lot of wine," he laughs. "Now, though, I see it as such a rich history for so many cultures and peoples... I'm just excited to be a part of it." *Veraison* is meant, in part, to celebrate the region and culture he's come to love: "It's always been my goal to bring exposure to the area, and by bringing this to Burning Man, that's exactly what we're doing."

The sculpture's name, *Veraison*, is a viticultural term for the process of grapes ripening from green to purple. The sculpture will capture this effect: each grape in the cluster will have colored lights inside it, which will be activated by the press of a button; while each grape can be turned from

green to purple individually, the cluster won't ripen as one unless the corresponding button for each grape is pressed simultaneously. The concerted effort required to ripen the entire cluster reflects the harmony of forces - temperature, growth phase, interplay of acids, sugars, and chlorophyll - necessary for *veraison* to take place. It also calls to mind community, which is at the very heart of the project.

Justin, who has experience with communal artmaking from his work in event production, performance, and leading Burning Man theme camps, will be partnering with a host of artisans and supporters to bring the project to fruition; in addition to the volunteers who will help him construct the sculpture, he will be partnering with renowned Burning Man artist Rebekah Waites, who will share the resources—materials, tools, labor—from her own Burning Man project with Justin as he builds *Veraison*. "It's not just my dream anymore," Justin explains. "Conceptualizing it was my part. But now, just the way that all the grapes together make the cluster, I'm gathering together all my grapes, my people, to make this giant cluster."

Follow @veraisonart on Instagram to get involved

*Veraison* is a partner in Arts and Culture El Dorado's Arts Incubator. Visit [artsandcultureeldorado.org/veraison](https://artsandcultureeldorado.org/veraison) to donate to the project.





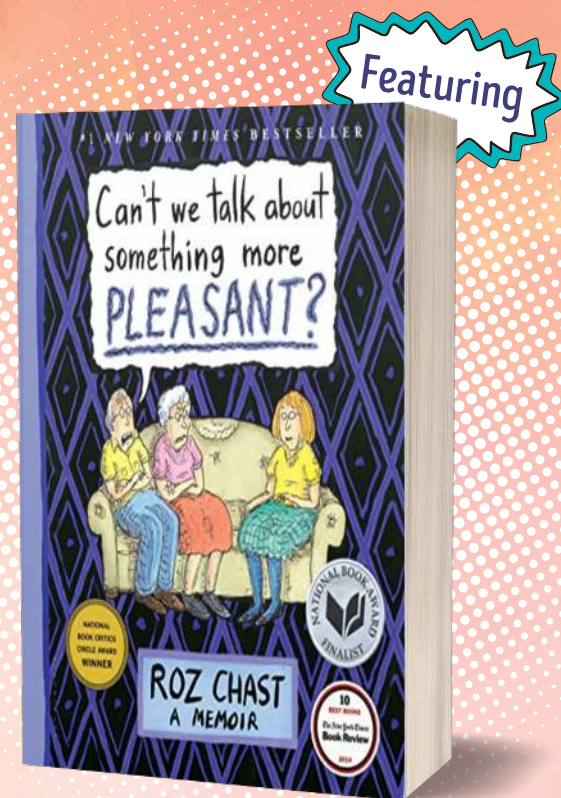
# NEA Big Read



## Can We Talk?

Roz Chast's graphic memoir, "Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?", approaches themes of aging, caregiving, and loss with generosity, sharp insight, and Chast's signature sense of humor. The graphic memoir and its themes—which may be particularly relevant in El Dorado County—are at the center of a countywide literary festival developed and administered by Arts and Culture El Dorado: NEA Big Read. NEA Big Read in El Dorado County features programming organized around key motifs in the book and in our community: storytelling as a graphic medium; memoir and self-expression as healing or therapeutic practices; intergenerational connection; and the emotions and experiences that accompany aging, caregiving, and loss.

As part of NEA Big Read, Arts and Culture El Dorado is partnering with the El Dorado County Library to bring vibrant programs and events to each branch library in the county. Programming includes book talks, self-portrait workshops, a conversation exchange, oral history collecting, and film screenings. In collaboration with local artists, Arts and Culture El Dorado will also be producing an illustrated anthology of collected stories and will install an accompanying exhibition in Switchboard Gallery.



**Opening Reception for Big Read Exhibition**  
Thursday, May 23 2024 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Arts and Culture El Dorado and  
Switchboard Gallery, 525 Main St  
Placerville, CA 95667

**Story Slam**  
Thursday, June 6 2024 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm  
Storytellers will have 5 minutes each to tell a story based on the theme of inherited stories.

Arts and Culture El Dorado and  
Switchboard Gallery, 525 Main St  
Placerville, CA 95667

**Artist Talk**  
Thursday, June 20 2024 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm  
A conversation between artist Gavin Sellers-Norman, oral historian Mariah Padilla, and exhibition curator Marya Osucha.

Arts and Culture El Dorado and  
Switchboard Gallery, 525 Main St  
Placerville, CA 95667



**Ars Vinifera**  
Celebrating the symbiosis of art and agriculture, this exhibition showcases original artworks that grace the labels of El Dorado County's world-class wines. The exhibition runs through May 19, 2024.



Oran Miller, "Art, Science, and Magic", from *Ars Vinifera*.



**A Picture's Worth: NEA Big Read at the Gallery**  
This exhibition of illustrator Gavin Sellers-Norman's original work features illustrations inspired by community-sourced oral histories and original audio recordings by personal historian Mariah Padilla. The exhibition opens with a reception on May 23 at 6 pm and runs through June 30, 2024.



Illustration by Gavin Sellers-Norman, from *A Picture's Worth*.





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## **The publication of Arts and Culture El Dorado**

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.