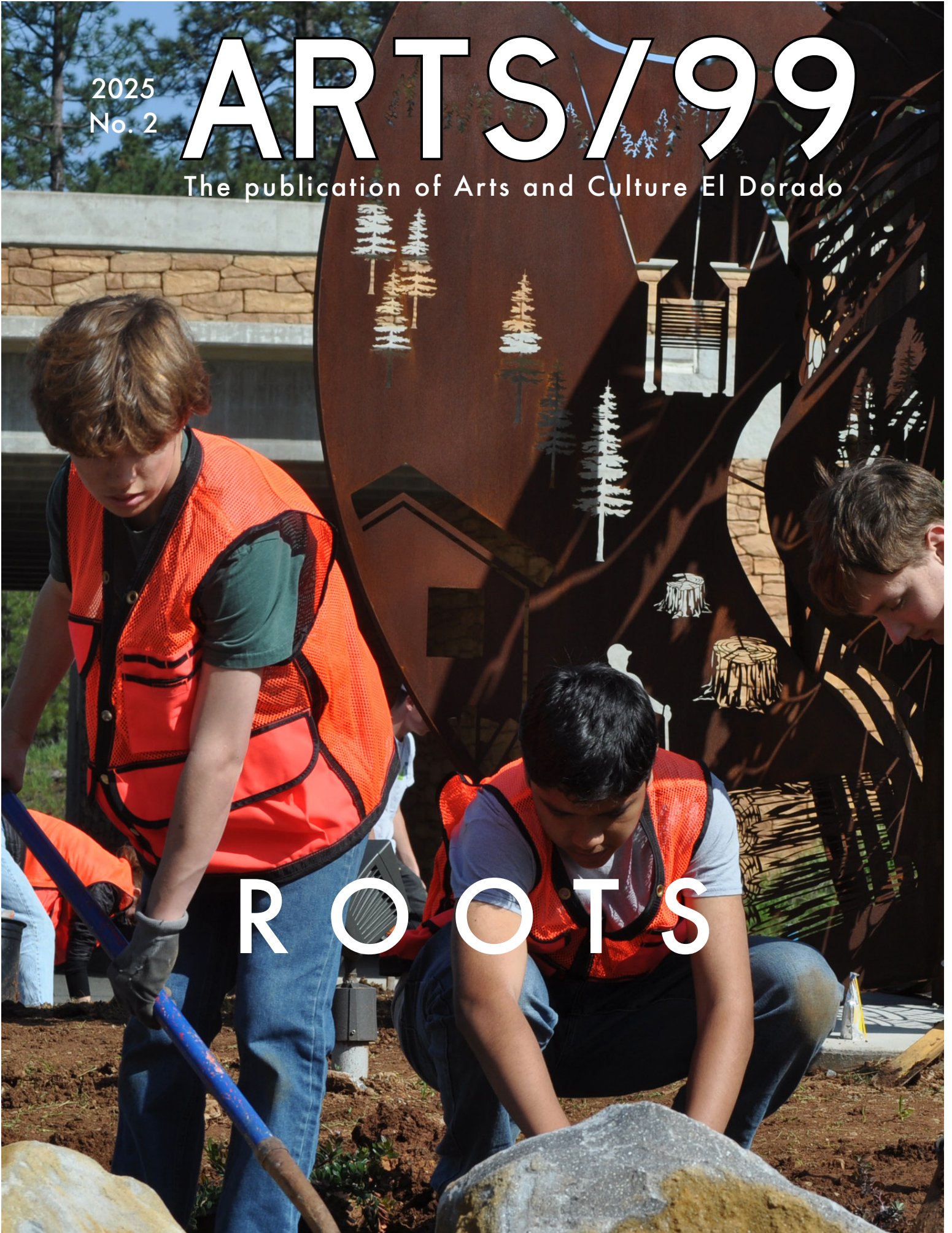


2025  
No. 2

# ARTS/99

The publication of Arts and Culture El Dorado

R O O T S





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## Dear Reader,

In this spring issue of *Arts 99*, we include a letter inviting you to our annual Benefit. This year, we will honor four women who made invaluable contributions to the Camino roundabout sculpture and, throughout their lives, to our community: Christa Campbell, Wendy Thomas, Terrie Bennett, and Krista Potter. The Benefit will take place Thursday, June 5 at Rainbow Orchards in Camino.

It is fitting that the Benefit should honor women instrumental in the creation of public art, and that it should take place in the spring, because it is springtime for public art in El Dorado County. This issue details several ongoing public art initiatives from Arts and Culture El Dorado, including two new roundabout sculptures in Meyers; introduces you to our new Public Art Coordinator, Nicki Bennett; profiles Krista Potter, whose students in the Natural Resources Program at El Dorado High School are sustainably landscaping the earth around the Camino roundabout sculpture; previews a new exhibition showcasing the fiber arts of El Dorado County in Switchboard Gallery; and celebrates Erin Levinson, sophomore at El Dorado High School, who took first place in a statewide poetry-writing competition while representing our County in Poetry Out Loud.

We also want to take this opportunity to acquaint you with another public art initiative taking place this spring: Our El Dorado, a collaboration between Arts and Culture El Dorado and our 2023-2025 Poet Laureate Stephen Meadows. Our El Dorado will publish original poetry from El Dorado County students, both online and in a chapbook of Meadows's poetry commemorating his term as Poet Laureate; every student contributor will receive a copy.

Thank you for your support.

**EDITOR** Jordan Hyatt-Miller

**DESIGNER** Dan Keenan

**PRINTER** Minuteman Press



Erin Levinson, a sophomore at El Dorado High School and the 2025 El Dorado County Poetry Out Loud Champion, took first place in California’s Statewide poetry-writing competition, Poetry Ourselves. Erin read her winning piece, “Metaphors”, during the Statewide Poetry Out Loud competition in Sacramento on March 16. Poetry Ourselves is a competition available only to Poetry Out Loud county champions. Students are invited to submit an original written poem of no more than 50 lines, to be judged anonymously by a guest poet. The winner receives \$100 and an opportunity to recite his or her poem during the state finals. The Poetry Ourselves creative writing competition has been offered to California county champions since 2019.

At the 2025 El Dorado County Poetry Out Loud Finals, administered by Arts and Culture El Dorado and held at Imagination Theater on Thursday, February 6, Erin took the top spot and advanced to the Statewide competition in Sacramento. Erin is the second El Dorado County Poetry Out Loud champion to take first place in the Poetry Ourselves poetry-writing competition in the six years since it began, joining Oak Ridge High School’s Emily Lieber, who took first place in 2021.

## Erin Levinson “Metaphors”

I am a mosaic, my façade color-rich yet artificial  
I am a gill-less tadpole, drowning with my first few breaths of home  
I am a half-empty cup, full in your eyes but draining fast when seen through mine.

Express yourself, they preach in grade-school English.  
Use metaphors; make yourself something you aren’t  
People will understand that way.

You grow to love your language; when your fingertips dance over the keyboard you become

A maestro of melodrama, a princeps of personification, an adept of alliteration  
Still, even language has limits.

Still, you silently scream what makes you you into the darkness every night, and no one hears.

Articulate as a clacking hen  
Communicative as a text message

What makes you different? you wonder. What makes us all different?  
Why can’t we understand each other? You throw yourself into your writing  
Maybe people will understand that way.

*I am a river, you write, ever-changing and feeling more of myself slip away with every second.*

*No. I am an island in a neverending archipelago, reaching reaching reaching*

*Over the unforgiving sea that separates—*

*No. I’m a vast ocean—*

*No. I’m a stagnant puddle—*

*I’m a single tear—*

Your throat is raw, although you haven’t made a sound.

What will it take for us to truly see each other? Where does cruelty come from?

As night creeps into morning, you can finally whisper the truth

Without dressing it up in figurative flowers.

*I’m a lost child.*

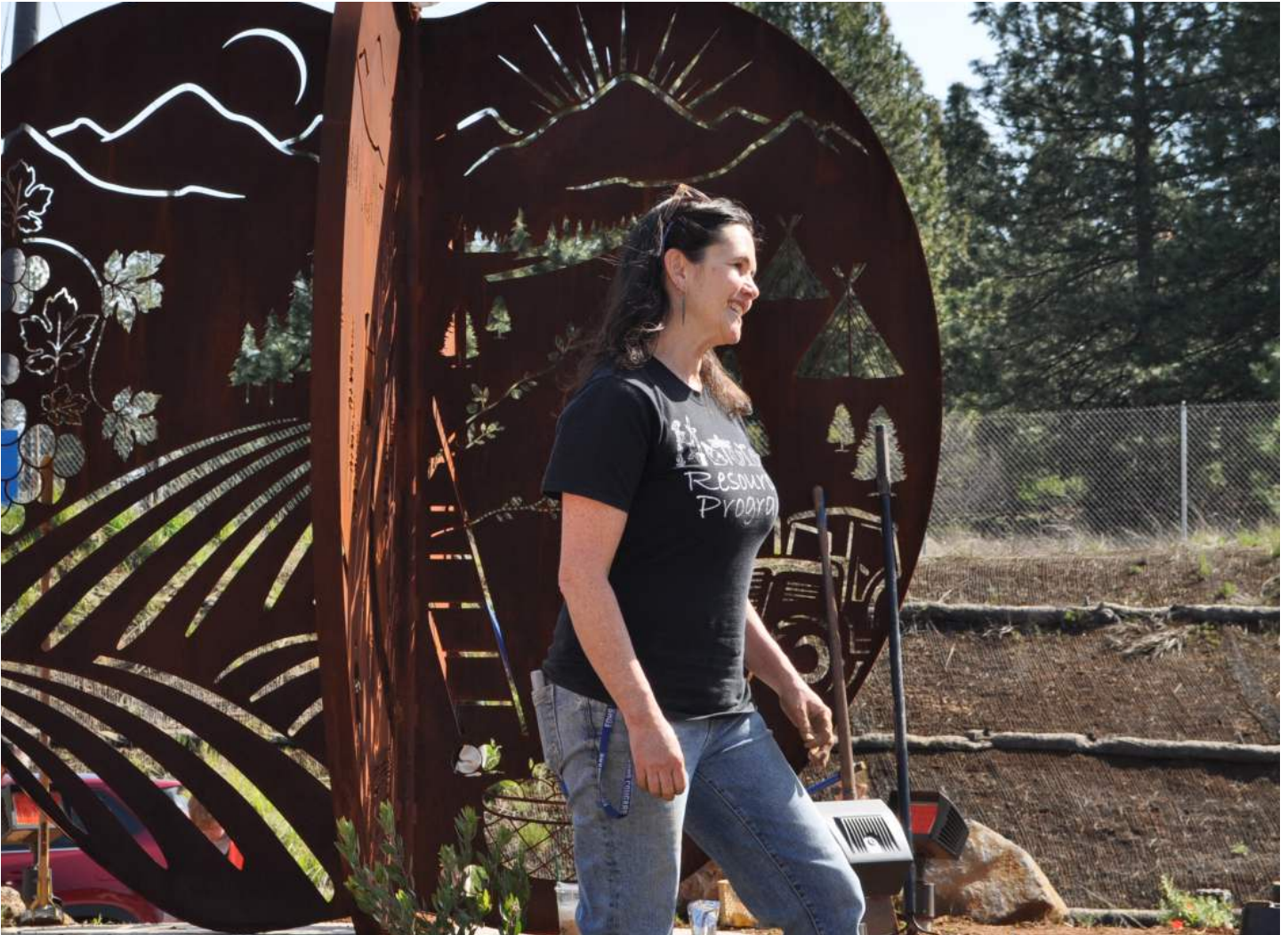
*I’m alone in the darkness.*

*I’m empty.*

*We all are.*

*Alone together in the inky-black, moon-bright world.*

*And if not in any other way, can’t we relate in that?*



*Krista Potter*

# Rooted in a Passion for Nature

Krista Potter, the lead teacher of El Dorado High School’s Natural Resources Program, was raised in suburban Los Angeles, “surrounded by loving, beautiful family, but low on traditional nature opportunities,” she recalls. It was on summer visits to family in rural New York and Quebec, where she tended expansive vegetable gardens and learned to hunt and fish, that her love of nature first took root. In her early twenties, Krista became a transplant, planting herself first

in Humboldt, where she earned her teaching credential and worked as a wildlife biologist, then in El Dorado County, where she and her husband, Kevin Potter, began teaching at El Dorado High School. “This was about as far south as we were willing to go, so we got really lucky and landed in Placerville,” Krista laughs.

Krista’s love of teaching grew from the same seed as her love of nature. “My passion for education is really

still rooted in my passion for nature itself. Thinking back to my childhood, like taking a hike in Quebec and then all of a sudden, this baby moose is on the trail in front of us, and feeling that explosion of excitement and adrenaline. But combined with those moments of peace, sitting for hours, just watching tadpoles burst forth from eggs, or summer thunderstorms roll across lakes. Sharing those moments with people was what I really found to be rewarding—and that’s where education came in.”



El Dorado High School's Natural Resources Program is a four-year pathway, working with students for their entire high school experience. Students learn traditional sciences like biology and chemistry "through the lens of ecology and plant-based education," Krista explains. They also gain valuable exposure to career paths in forestry, agriculture, and wildlife biology. As seniors, they design their own "scientific inquiry project"; these projects include a service component, allowing students to give back to their community with the knowledge they have gained over their four years in the program.

"Service has always been a big part of my life," Krista says. In El Dorado County, her commitment to service is reciprocated: "I am constantly astounded at the generosity of my neighbors... We are in a special place and I am very grateful for the people in this community," Krista says. "We had some wildlife biologists sitting on our campus for four hours, in 30-degree weather, waiting for deer to come in so we could collar them. It is just one

example of the generosity of time and knowledge that people around here are willing to give." Krista feels that same generosity from her co-teachers, as well. "My partners, Amy Reifke and Michelle Wren, are so dedicated and creative... I'm so grateful for them. They make it all possible."

Alongside service and science, creative expression is a key element of students' experiences in the Natural Resources Program. For Krista, creative expression is one more way of engaging with the natural world. "I feel like art deepens my connection with the ecosystems I study," Krista explains. "With science, I can understand the energy flow through a food web, but it's through art that I can really see the detail of the individuals that are part of that food web, and even celebrate their beauty and deepen my appreciation of them." Krista's students explore nature through art in various ways—from murals to poetry—but the most visible example may be their ongoing sustainable landscaping around Terrie Bennett's apple sculpture at the center of the

roundabout in Camino; the students are planting "native plants that will increase habitat for local pollinators, whether it be bees or moss or butterflies, and making sure that they are low-water-use and high-habitat-value."

Krista's daughters, Wrenna and Amani, are developing their own passion for the outdoors. Seeing their growth, such as on a recent family backpacking trip along the John Muir Trail, Krista is reminded of the most rewarding aspects of teaching. "I love providing opportunities for students to explore the world in order to discover their passion and their purpose. Watching students find connection or be excited about something is just incredibly powerful... And we hope that every student leaves here seeing themselves as a leader. We want to teach them what true leadership is—that it's not about power, but about empowerment, helping others to find their purpose and to find their passion."



Claire Romelfanger

# FIBER ARTS ON DISPLAY

Arts and Culture El Dorado's new exhibition, *Filaments: Fiber Arts in El Dorado County*, features work from 22 local artists belonging to the Hangtown Fibers Guild alongside displays of tools and equipment used in the production of fiber arts. The artists' work spans a wide range of subject matters, techniques, and materials, showcasing an artform and an industry that are essential to the fabric of El Dorado County.

For Sharon Diehl, President of the Guild, fiber arts have always been interwoven with community. Sharon moved to El Dorado County in 1999. Although she had a number of friends and family, including her daughter and granddaughter, in the area, she found a new kind of belonging when she joined the Fibers Guild. "It felt like a discovery of my people," she recounts. "It's a great way to get together with like-minded people who just have a passion for creating and working with fibers." Sharon's sense of community is shared by the over 100 members of the Fibers Guild. Founded in 1981, the mission of the guild is to "encourage growth and knowledge of the fiber arts through meetings, workshops, lectures, and

the exchange of ideas". Members work in a variety of mediums, from basketmaking to knitting to felting and dyeing. Other members are shepherds and shepherdesses who produce the textiles—particularly from alpaca—that the other members of the guild use to make their art. "There is tremendous variety within the fiber arts, and there is a tremendous amount of talent in this area," Sharon explains. "El Dorado County has a very strong fiber arts scene." Together, the guild's diverse members form the threads of a rich tapestry spanning El Dorado County, from farms in Somerset to shops on Placerville's Main Street.

Sharon sees the Fibers Guild as a crucial vessel for generational knowledge. "It's very important to know where these materials come from. One of the objectives for the whole guild is to show the history of the production of these fibers and how these arts have been integral for hundreds of years in this area," Sharon says. In the wake of the recent passing of several beloved, longtime members of the Fibers Guild, Sharon wants to ensure that the guild's collective knowledge is kept alive for future generations. "We are

focused on educating our young people and getting younger people into the guild. We want to be able to share this information hands-on with people who are interested."

To that end, the guild has two big objectives for the future: establishing a dedicated physical location, and founding a school for fiber arts within that location. With exhibitions like the one in Switchboard Gallery, Sharon sees a model for the kind of engagement the guild hopes to have with the community in the future. "For us, it's a passion, and we want to help ignite that passion in other people," she says.

*Filaments: Fiber Arts in El Dorado County* is on display until June 1, 2025 at Arts and Culture El Dorado's Switchboard Gallery, located at 525 Main Street in Placerville.

For more information about the exhibition, please visit [artsandcultureeldorado.org/gallery](https://artsandcultureeldorado.org/gallery)

To learn more about Hangtown Fibers Guild, please visit [hangtownfibersguild.com](https://hangtownfibersguild.com)



*Sharon Diehl*



*Agnes Forshey*



# NEW INROADS FOR PUBLIC ART

In September 2024, a sculpture was unveiled at the center of the recently constructed Camino roundabout. Wrought from Corten steel by local artist Terrie Bennett, the enormous artwork consisted of four panels in the shape of an apple, each with cut-out designs depicting elements of the region's history and culture. The Camino Gateway Sculpture, which was arrived at by committee through a series of community meetings and surveys, represented an exercise in community self-definition and a collective celebration of place.

The sculpture, which was a project in Arts and Culture's Arts Incubator program, is a particularly vivid example of Arts and Culture El Dorado's ongoing empowerment of public art. In 2025, two more roundabout sculptures in Meyers are in the planning process; work has begun on the Placerville Story Walk, which will bring public art to Placerville's Main Street; the City of Placerville adopted the Public Art Plan produced by Arts and Culture El Dorado; a committee on Public Art in Placerville will be convened by Arts and Culture El Dorado; and Nicki Bennett, who was instrumental in the planning and installation of the Camino Gateway Sculpture, became the new Public Art Coordinator for Arts and Culture El Dorado.

Nicki Bennett was born and raised in El Dorado County; she was also born and raised in the arts. Her grandfather and his twin brother started Bennett Sculpture in South Lake Tahoe in the 1970s; he later founded the Bennett Foundry in Placerville in the 1990s. Nicki's mother, Terrie Bennett, the artist who created the Camino Gateway Sculpture, carried on the family legacy, becoming a renowned sculptor in her own right. Nicki applied her own creativity in a range of fields, from owning a restaurant to working in hospitality to coordinating marketing and advertising for a sailing company. "I like to wear a lot of hats," Nicki laughs. That's part of what appeals to her about helping bring public art to fruition: "Coordinating public art can be complex and complicated," Nicki explains. "There is definitely an element of problem solving and a huge creative component... I find the process to be really interesting."

As Public Art Coordinator, Nicki is an essential link between public agencies, individual artists, and the broader community. She points

to the process behind the Camino Gateway Sculpture as an example of the collaborative process by which public art can meet the needs of a community. "Art connects as humans, so when you have public art that is informed by the community and the history of a place, it allows everyone to interpret and interact with the work... I see art as foundational, kind of a web that connects us all and brings us together to share perspectives and enjoy beauty."

Native both to El Dorado County and to the arts scene within it, Nicki is driven by a commitment to community. "We have a legacy here—I've always known it as an arts community. I want to bring that to the forefront and make it a reason why people visit... I feel strongly about this community having a revival in the arts, because there is so much potential here."

As she spearheads Arts and Culture El Dorado's ongoing Public Art initiatives, Nicki sees her work as a way to give back to El Dorado County. "I want to create a framework that can be duplicated and adopted throughout our community, for public art projects large and small. I feel so grateful and excited for this opportunity."

You can help shape the future of public art in Placerville by applying to join the Placerville Public Art Committee. This committee will review proposed public art projects and make recommendations to the Placerville City Council. Email Nicki Bennett at [nicki@artsandcultureeldorado.org](mailto:nicki@artsandcultureeldorado.org) or check online at [artsandcultureeldorado.org](http://artsandcultureeldorado.org), where information about joining the committee will be posted soon.



**Nicki Bennett and Terrie Bennett**

# Art. Agriculture. Education. Public Service.

These are the hallmarks of our great county, and so it is with great pleasure that we announce our upcoming 2025 Annual Benefit celebrating the achievements of Christa Campbell, Wendy Thomas, Terrie Bennett, and Krista Potter.

You probably know at least one of these outstanding women, or maybe all four. Wendy and Christa are perhaps better known countywide, Wendy for her dedicated public service as well as for her career as an artist and arts supporter, Christa for her iconic Rainbow Orchards—surely you’ve had one of her donuts—and for her community service on the boards and committees so essential to our quality of life.

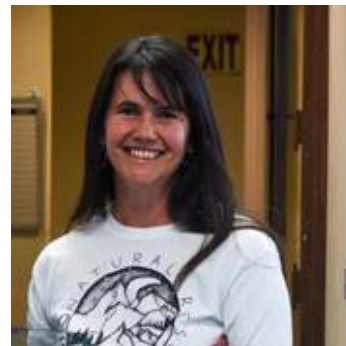
Terrie Bennett is a member of the acclaimed Bennett Sculpture family and is responsible for, among other works, the glorious apple sculpture gracing our Camino Roundabout. Krista Potter is the director of the El Dorado High School Natural Resources Program and works with her students on a four-year course of study that promotes critical thinking and problem solving, environmental stewardship and community development, all on a 40-acre “wild laboratory” campus in Camino.

These four women were the driving force behind the Roundabout Sculpture project, which was conceived and completed on time and on budget, and now stands majestically to welcome visitors to the Camino-Fruitridge Ag District. So we celebrate them for this achievement, but also for their life’s work and enduring commitment to community.

And now we invite you to become a Patron of our 2025 Benefit, which will be held on Thursday, June 5, at 5:30 pm, in the lovely setting of Rainbow Orchards.



To become a Patron or purchase tickets, please visit [artsandcultureeldorado.org/2025-benefit/](https://artsandcultureeldorado.org/2025-benefit/) or follow the QR code.



*Clockwise: Terrie Bennett, Krista Potter, Christa Campbell, Wendy Thomas*

*“We are so happy that our annual benefit is back in the month of June – it will be a lovely time of year at Rainbow Orchards, and we invite the community to join us as we celebrate these four remarkable women. We will gather for an afternoon of great food and wine, fantastic music, good friends and arts supporters, and best of all our guests will be helping to sustain the vital work of Arts and Culture El Dorado – support that is more important than ever this year. We look forward to seeing you at Rainbow in June!”*

**- Terry LeMoncheck, Executive Director**

# New Arts Incubator Projects

Arts and Culture El Dorado'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. Arts and Culture El Dorado accepts Incubator projects which have an arts and culture focus and serve the public good.

Your tax-deductible contributions to these projects support cultural innovation in El Dorado County.

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arteSana is dedicated to creating welcoming spaces for the original peoples, residents and guests of the El Dorado County region to practice diverse contemporary folk art traditions in a nurturing, multilingual context.

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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.