

EDITORIAL

The casual weekend visitor to Gualala might not know Gualala Arts even exists, but anyone who lives here knows how vital for our community life it has become, especially since the Arts Center building was completed in 1995. Surrounded by a grove of majestic trees along the Gualala River bank, the lovely facility serves as the hub of an ever-expanding array of activities that encompass much more than its name suggests.

The mission statement goal “to promote public interest and participation in the arts since 1961” harkens back to the origins of the annual Art in the Redwoods festival, but “art” now entails much more than putting paint on a canvas. The just concluded production of *The Diary of Anne Frank* illustrates how one event can enrich the lives of the fourteen performers, the extensive production crew, and the audiences that enjoyed coming to one of the six performances.

Nowhere in a community of this size can children be exposed to quality drama at a well appointed professional venue with expert coaching and nowhere can audiences receive such entertainment value with four theatrical productions a year including musicals such as *Annie* and *Scrooge* to spice up the holiday season. These events appeal not just to the artistically inclined, but also serve the entire community.

Local schools and our children benefit in a number of ways. In a community that can offer limited organized summer activities, for sixteen years Gualala Arts has sponsored the Summer Arts Program for youngsters ages 3 to 13 for two one-week sessions in July.

This year preschoolers had a three-hour Art and Physical Ed program while older students signed up for classes in Ceramics, Drama, Creative Art & Crafts, Irish Dancing Drawing, Painting, Sculpture and the popular Culinary Arts class taught by Executive Director David “Sus” Susalla.

Gualala Arts and the Lions Club also sponsor partial scholarships to help those unable to meet the tuition costs necessary to cover overhead and teacher salaries so that no local child who wants to participate will miss out on this opportunity.

The center also offers continuing education classes such as psychology, English as a Second Language creative writing, and in recent years astronomy for youngsters to augment the offerings at local schools, for those being home schooled, and for interested adults. Each year the gallery displays the artwork of both elementary and high school students.

Since 2000 Gualala Arts has awarded twenty-three scholarships ranging from \$500 to \$2000 to graduating seniors to further their interest in the arts. Past winners have been musicians, dancers, filmmakers, animation artists, and fashion designers as well as painters and sculptors.

Annually, the Gualala Arts facility has been the venue for Point Arena High School’s Sober Grad Night and the award receptions every June. Coleman Auditorium has been transformed into a glittering ballroom for both Junior Proms and other school dances. Also, the Pacific Community Charter School holds its annual crab-feed fundraiser there.

Other local groups use the facility for fundraisers as well. Redwood Coast Medical Services, Shamli Hospice, Soroptimists, Redwood Coast Rec Center, and the Gualala Boosters Club all stage annual events at the arts center. Many individuals find it an excellent place to hold weddings, receptions, and memorial services, all of which benefit local businesses such as caterers and lodging establishments.

The business community also gains from Gualala Arts major events that attract tourists. Art in the Redwoods and the Whale and Jazz Festival. Both continue to draw larger and larger crowds, but other one-time events also make Gualala a desirable destination. The sold-out Maria Muldar concert appealed to pop and blues audiences and concerts such as last year’s appearance by Cleo Laine provided a major draw for jazz aficionados.

Recent partnerships have forged even stronger ties with the business community. The Holiday Showcase presents local retailers’ wares in a gallery setting for locals and visitors alike. The popular chowder challenge showcases both amateur cooks and chefs of local restaurants and wineries.

These events, just some of the more than 1,700 activities calendared in 2006, appeal to a wide range of tastes and are not limited in scope. One night patrons may enjoy the Mendonoma Idol competition, another night a rock & roll dance with Switchville performing, another night a lecture on Alzheimer’s disease, and on another, a chamber music piano or ensemble concert.

Finally, one cannot forget the many activities that enrich the lives of those who are retired and pursuing new avocations or just volunteering their expertise to strengthen this crown jewel in our community. Where else along the scenic Northern California coast, or anywhere for that matter, can a community of this size support an organization that contributes so much to enhance the quality of life for all its residents?

Sketches Newsletter of Gualala Arts Center

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