

art in the redwoods

A local tradition that continues to grow and nurture the community of Gualala



ALL PHOTOS COURESTY GUALALA ARTS CENTER

By Alan Ahtow

The year 1961 was pivotal for the art community in Gualala, for it was then that two local women, Betty O'Neil and Kathy (Rubel) DiMaio, were inspired by a visit to the Oakland Flower Show to stage a similar event at the Gualala Community Center. This small local art show would become the catalyst for Art in the Redwoods, the showcase event that for over 50 years has defined, inspired, and represented Gualala Arts.

The annual Art in the Redwoods festival takes place over four days in August in and around the building and grounds of the Gualala Arts Center, an architectural gem nestled in the coastal redwoods and home to the festival since 1998. The festival features a host of events and activities that attracts scores of vendors and artists along with hundreds of visitors, both local and from afar.

O'Neil and DiMaio created an artistic centerpiece modeled after California's world famous giant redwood trees to anchor the first Art in the Redwoods show. Along with floral arrangements, original local art was displayed throughout the Community Center's main hall. Over the years the event grew in popularity, and the seeds of tradition were sown.

This included an increase in the number of participating artists who created work for display and sale, peer judging, and a raffle where a local handmade quilt was, and is still, the main raffle prize. After a few years a physical move of the event into various surrounding local gardens containing real redwood trees solidified its historic roots, and this annual show became the major impetus for creating the Gualala Arts Center, now the permanent home of the event.

Art in the Redwoods has sparked many innovative programs

and additional events for and at the Arts Center. Gualala Arts nurtures the growth of budding artists through such programs as the Young Artist Scholarship Program, which gives money raised from the Art in the Redwoods Quilt Raffle to gifted young local artists so they can continue furthering their artistic passion and education. The Arts in the Schools program encourages a diverse variety of artwork created by students ranging from preschoolers to 12th grade, and these works are put on display at the Arts Center in March for all to enjoy.

The Summer Art Program for Youth offered during the first two weeks of July provides an amazing opportunity for children ranging in ages from four to fourteen to experience fun and creative workshops, including music, dance, culinary, textile, beading, and much more. In this Olympics year the program will focus on the cultural treasures and traditions of the peoples of the various Russian regions to help foster understanding and to embrace the role Russian people have played since the 19th century in the life of the Sonoma and Mendocino coasts.

The Summer Art Program serves as a foundation for a lifelong interest and participation in the arts for many local children. A great example is Iliana Frida Clarissa Sanchez, who attended the Summer Art Program when she was six and every year thereafter. When she was too old to attend as a camper, she became a youth leader and found that her passion in life is teaching young children. She was awarded the MVP Group Leader Award at the 2012 Art Camp, and is one of the four winners of 2013's Gualala Arts Young Artist Scholarship awards. To pursue her dream of becoming an art teacher she plans



to attend City College of San Francisco.

One of the first recipients of a Gualala Arts Young Artist Scholarship, Steve Oliff, went on to become a professional illustrator for Marvel Comics, and he also draws the weekly "Armature" cartoon in the local Independent Coast Observer newspaper.

The Art in the Redwoods festival built the Gualala Arts Center and is the top fundraising event for Gualala Arts. The "Top Hat Dinner" (August 14) kicks off the festival and has become a "must attend gala evening" that truly encompasses the spirit and creativity of the Gualala arts community. The "Champagne Preview" (August 15) offers the public their first chance to view the festival's winning entries and purchase the art. The full Art in the Redwoods festival hits its stride on Saturday and Sunday (August 16 & 17) with vendor booths, live music and dance, great local food, and activities for all ages.

The continuing success and proceeds generated from the Art in the Redwoods festival help the Gualala Arts branch out by creating and supporting many other programs, events, and



performances held throughout the year. The future preservation and evolution of the Gualala Arts Center, like the precious redwoods, needs a constant source of proponents and participants to insure continued growth, protection, and survival. Like the giant trees, art is a living, breathing entity that requires a nurturing atmosphere. Art centers everywhere require their communities' support, utilization, and investment to maintain and foster a creative environment for artists of all kinds and ages to call home.

The first Art in the Redwoods festival sowed the seeds in Gualala and its surrounding communities that grew into the gem that is the Gualala Arts Center. The hundreds of events, performances, workshops, classes, and exhibits branch out in new directions every year and provide a showcase for all artists, local and beyond, and a nurturing environment for the next generation. The majestic groves of redwoods that stand sentry around the Arts Center and that inspired O'Neil and DiMaio 53 years ago with the first Art in the Redwoods continue to guard and secure that legacy.

For more information, please visit www.GualalaArts.org

Gualala Arts Promises Exciting Slate of 2014 Events



Gualala Arts has been dedicated to promoting public interest and participation in the arts since 1961. Spring/Summer 2014 will see exciting events, festivals, workshops, exhibits and performances at the Gualala Arts Center that will appeal to a wide variety of ages, tastes and interests.

The Sonoma/Mendocino Coast Whale & Jazz Festival returns in April for its 11th year, and will feature the ever-popular Chowder Challenge on April 12 and internationally renowned violinist Mads Tolling and his Jazz Europa ensemble playing the Main Event on April 26.

The 30th Annual Architectural Tour, Wine Tasting & Auction happens on May 10, with 25 award winning wineries pouring their premium wines and donating wine related auction lots.

Memorial Day weekend sees the **Fine Arts Fair** fill the grounds of the Arts Center with 25+ artists and craftsmen selling their creations.

The Global Harmony Season of Offerings presents music, art, dance and food throughout spring, starting off the day after the spring equinox with Rumi's Caravan on March 21 and culminating in a very special weeklong Yakut arts & cultural festival that climaxes on the Summer Solstice on June 21.

July brings in the always popular **Gualala Arts Auto Show** and **"Summernationals" Pinewood Derby** races on July 19 and **Automobilia** fine art exhibit all month.

Finally, the 53rd annual **Art in the Redwoods** festival closes out the summer with the Top Hat Dinner August 14, the Champagne Preview August 15 and the Art in the Redwoods festival itself on August 16 and 17.

Come to the **Gualala Arts Center** at 46501 Gualala Road, Gualala for all of these events and many more. Event information is available at (707) 884-1138. Or online at: GualalaArts.org