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Las Trampas Exhibit Shows the Power of Art

By Diane Claytor



Patty Lawrence holds her painting that's being exhibited at the Lafayette Library Photos Diane Claytor

said proudly. "Their disability may be a part of who they are, but it certainly doesn't define them."

Fifteen artists and 25 works will be featured in the Lafayette Library exhibit. "Our clients don't actually draw as much as they do abstract coloring," said Kathy Merchant, Las Trampas' development director. "They use the colors and motions they feel like using at the time."

Most of their paintings are bright, colorful and contemporary looking. "It's wonderful for our clients, the majority of whom are nonverbal or marginally verbal, to be able to express themselves through their art. And this exhibit is a great chance for us to share the Las Trampas story," Merchant said. Hogue agreed, noting that he, too, is excited that the local community will have this wonderful opportunity to see a small sample of what the Las Trampas clients are able to accomplish.

The Las Trampas story began back in 1938, when Helen Lucas ran a school at the Lafayette site for children with developmental challenges. Twenty years later, with Lucas' health failing, parents and community members came together to purchase the property and keep it going as a non-profit residential school where children with developmental disabilities could thrive; in the late 1960s, the current buildings were constructed. As times changed and public schools began mainstreaming children with developmental disabilities into the school system, Las Trampas changed its focus to work with moderately to profoundly challenged adults.

Today, Las Trampas provides day program educational and vocational services, residential services and support and independent living services. Their Adult Development Program, on the Lafayette campus, serves 70 clients, most low-income and over the age of 22. This five-days-per-week

On a short, easy-to-miss street in Lafayette sits an older, unassuming building facing the Lafayette-Moraga Trail and surrounded by a neighborhood of well-kept homes. A line of cars and vans parked along the street indicate something is happening here. Inside, a flurry of activities is taking place.

One such activity - art class - produces lovely paintings; so lovely, in fact, that, at the invitation of the Public Arts Committee, an exhibit featuring these works is taking place in the Lafayette Library's Community Hall Art Gallery through May 1. The community is invited to view the art and enjoy a reception honoring the Las Trampas artists at the library at 6 p.m. on March 28, preceding the Lafayette City Council meeting.

This is no ordinary art exhibit. These artists are members of Las Trampas, a community of men and women with moderate to profound developmental disabilities. At Las Trampas, with their tagline of "Success Beyond Disability," these clients, as Executive Director Dan Hogue calls them, are absolutely valued and respected. They're taught to discover their capabilities and learn to lead full lives. "These are people first and foremost," Hogue

program allows clients to learn skills, develop friendships and embrace possibilities. Their day includes learning skills for daily living and social interaction; there are classes in art, dancing, communications, cooking and assisted technology. "Routine is very important to our clients," Hogue said. "We are very proud of the work we do to expand the horizons of the individuals we serve."

Merchant added that their program serves as a welcome respite to the families and caregivers of their clients. "We don't just serve our clients, we serve their families, too." Merchant said. "It's important for the families to know that their loved ones are cared for in a safe and nurturing environment. If Las Trampas wasn't here, what would these families do?"

The day program has a staff of 25. "The hands-on, day-to-day staff do tough work and they're truly dedicated to the people they serve," Merchant said.

In addition to the Las Trampas artists, Diana Boegel, a client's sister, will be exhibiting her pencil sketches of several members of the Las Trampas family. And as an added bonus, works by the late Nelson Tygart, a former Las Trampas client whose collectible art had been displayed at the Barclay Simpson Art Gallery several years ago, will be included in the exhibit.



Russell Morgan shares the artwork he has on display at the Lafayette Library.

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