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Orinda Arts Council Celebrates 60 Years of Service

Submitted by Jane Greenthal



(L to R): Betty Hagstrom, OAC President 1964-1965, and Irene Wilkinson, OAC volunteer art teacher during 1960's.

On Sunday, June 13, the Orinda Arts Council held its 60th Anniversary Celebration at the historic Orinda Country Club. A medley of recent school and Orinda Idol performances rang clearly through the sunny veranda as guests watched a moving montage of enthusiastic students sing, dance and act their hearts out. Displays of student artwork, playbills, exhibits for OIS Docent copper tooling and batik projects, and scrapbooks spanning the decades evoked fond memories as well as serve as wonderful reminders of the OAC's many achievements and the thousands of children and citizens in our community impacted by its work. The program included speakers from each decade and live performances by our local talented youth. One attendee remarked, "It's amazing how the Orinda Arts Council has grown since I was involved thirty years ago. Adding the performing arts is especially wonderful and you can see how the creative talents of our youth are being fostered in so many ways."

Sentimental vignettes told of an evolving organization, from a children's art center to community vanguard of the arts, along with convivial events such as "Mai-Fest", complete with maypole, and the Mexican-themed "Fiesta de Los Artes" in the 70's, "Octoberfest" and "Western Round-Up" in the 80's, "Art in Bloom" theme parties in the 90's, and the spectacular "Birdhaus" displays in 2005. Each decade brought new ideas, new goals, new partners: from raising funds for the Orinda Community Center and Auditorium to managing the Orinda Library Art Gallery to co-sponsoring events with the California Independent Film Festival and participating in the Art in Public Places Committee, just to name a few.

Attendees included Kate Faust, the granddaughter of Joseph Sheaff, School Superintendent from 1950-1971, who with Doris Fraser, helped found the OAC. Orinda resident and life-long friend of Doris Fraser, Joey Judge, was also on hand to recount her days as one of the first students selected for the Orinda Children's Art Center in 1950. Other attendees included several past presidents: Betty Hagstrom (1964-1965), Anne Meyers (1987-1988), Danee Jurichko (1997-1998), Sue Farmer (1999-2000 & 2004-2005), and Sue's co-President in 2004, CeCe Werson, as well as recent past presidents Myrna Witt, Maggie Boscoe, Susan Mautner, Petra Michel and Nancy Daniels, who are all still active members of the OAC today. Renowned artists Dorothy Davis, Andrew Denman, Liz Piatt and Gerry Wallace (all of whom have long histories with the OAC as exhibitors and some, as art teachers), generously donated unique works for the event's raffle and were present to inspire budding young artists and ardent art collectors alike.

Reviewing sixty years of passionate, non-stop activity proved to be a remarkably uplifting occasion as attendees reminisced about the volunteer camaraderie and shared inspiring stories about the many beneficiaries. As Irene Wilkinson, a volunteer from the 1960's stated, "I remember carrying the art supplies for the classes that we provided at the schools, particularly to Sleepy Hollow where my own children were students. My daughter learned to love art through those early experiences and she has gone on to become a professional artist... what a great gift from the OAC!"

The OAC created a special keepsake book for the occasion and past president Nancy Daniels characterized her role in its creation by saying, "the treasure trove of archives opened a lot of doors to me to understanding this organization. On the one hand, it was a wonderful social history, but on a more personal level, it spoke to me about community. Over the decades, people come in, contribute, and eventually move on, while giving so much of themselves and their passions, expertise, skills and caring to make this community better culturally and creatively."

Susan Garell, OAC's current president, emceed the event and stated, "this decade [is] about mutual support and partnership representative of our activities with other arts organizations and advocates in the community to strengthen our individual efforts... the OAC has contributed \$75,000 over the last three years to support the arts in the schools and community and we couldn't have done so without our donors."

To further the Orinda Arts Council's continued legacy of promoting the arts in our schools and community, anyone wishing to support the OAC can send inquiries to oac@bluestar.com or send tax-deductible donations to The Orinda Arts Council, P.O. Box 121, Orinda, CA 94563. Limited copies of the keepsake book are also still available and inquiries can be sent to oac@bluestar.com.



Samantha Martin and Isabel Mueller, 2009 Orinda Idol Group Winners, sang a duet from "Wicked." Photos Ohlen Alexander

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