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Lafayette Locals Contribute to New Book

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Cailin Mirabella, 10, drew the cover art for *Our Place: Lafayette* during a Lafayette partners in Education Art Class. The publishers received 250-300 cover art submissions from Lafayette third graders. Photos Cathy Dausman

To insure the book's Lafayette history references were authentic, the authors turned to Mary McCosker. McCosker is president of Lafayette Historical Society and a published author herself. Lafayette third grade classrooms use her book, *A Town Called Lafayette*, which she co-authored with Emily Haas. A fifty year Lafayette native, McCosker downplays her role as historical fact-checker. "Carla [author Carla Sakrison] contacted me sometime last year," she says simply. But McCosker is excited about the new book because she knows it will generate more interest in Lafayette.

The *Our Place* cover contest didn't just happen on its own. Help came in the form of supplemental art classes taught by staff at the non-profit Lafayette Partners in Education. Kathy Sobel taught Cailin's class. "In late February or early March of 2010, we approached our 3rd grade art instructors with the idea of teaching a project related to Lafayette," Sobel says. "Third graders traditionally study Lafayette history, so that grade was the obvious choice for this project." LPIE art classes are taught by professional artists who teach in each classroom (1st thru 5th grade) 15 hours a year.

The collaboration between authors was an exercise in cross-country connections. Sakrison lives in Menlo Park, and Nash, in Connecticut. Sakrison, an Acalanes High School graduate, was a classmate of co-author Gaylen Nash's husband, and Nash knew the series publishers. Sakrison and Nash communicated via phone calls and e-mail. While the co-authors enjoyed exploring and photographing local points of interest Sakrison says the project gave her a chance to "fall in love with Lafayette again."

Our Place: Lafayette is the seventh in a series of books Hometown publishers say is "intended to teach children about local history and convey an appreciation of the natural environment." Lafayette is the first city outside Connecticut to be featured. Lamorinda residents will recognize illustrations of local shops, landmarks and recreational sites, all seen through the eyes of a dog named Jack. The first three books in the series received a 2010 Mom's Choice Award (silver recipient). Inside and out, *Our Place: Lafayette* highlights both the city and its locals. It takes a village to write a book.

Our Place: Lafayette (\$18.75 retail) arrives in local book stores in July; promoters are planning an event to take place at Storyteller in Lafayette. A portion of the proceeds (\$1.75 per book) will be donated to LPIE and the Lafayette Historical Society.

Cailin Mirabella is just 10-years old, but she's already designed winning artwork. Twice. A poster she designed while living in Arkansas in 2009 took first place in the second grade category in a statewide Smokey Bear contest. Now this self-possessed Lafayette Elementary School student has her artwork featured on the cover of a soon-to-be released children's history book called *Our Place: Lafayette*. The 40-page story, co-authored by Carla Sakrison and Gaylen Nash, is narrated by a Golden Retriever named Jack. Cailin's painting is a rendition of Lafayette Reservoir's iconic tower done in blues and greens.

Cailin nearly forgot about her own entry (the work was submitted last spring) until her teacher received an early copy of the book. She recalls thinking: "Wait, is that my painting? I think it is!" The young cover artist cautions that her painting is "not realistic" but feels "little kids will like [the story]," especially because it is told from a dog's point of view.

While Cailin's cover art decorates the outside, Susan Weaver's words greet the reader inside. Weaver is Library Manager at Lafayette Library and Learning Center, but she's never too busy to promote reading. Weaver felt honored when the authors approached her about writing their forward. Her words reflect a passion for learning: "As a librarian, one of the adventures I savor most is helping young people discover how much fun it is to learn new things. And when kids have an opportunity to learn about the place where they live and study and play soccer and go trick-or-treating and ride their bikes - well, that's just magical." Weaver found the *Our Place* book "so colorful, and so Lafayette."



Carla Cook Sakrison (left) and Gaylen Nash co-authored a children's pictorial history book about Lafayette.



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