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For the Love of a School

Parents, grandparents, and preschool alumni pitch in for a new roof at Mulberry Tree

By Sophie Braccini



From left: Susie Allison and Cathy Harris climb on a play structure at Mulberry Tree Preschool to take a look at the new roof.
Photo Sophie Braccini

It feels cool inside the Mulberry Tree Preschool these days, even when the sun beats down on the charming round building that sits next to the Moraga Commons on St. Mary's Road. The cool effect is a by-product of the badly needed roof restoration that happened last month. The new white flat roof was a big expense, but the community of parents and alumni got together to help underwrite the expense, showing their support for this little Moraga institution.

"We only had a short period of time to raise the money, we ran different scenarios and decided to simply spread the word to current parents and alumni," Parents Enrichment Committee co-chair Cathy Harris explains. "We just laid down the facts and asked for help."

The effort Harris spearheaded was a community project, and she says this was her first nonprofit fundraising effort for a school. The preschool had also never done fundraising before.

Mulberry Tree Preschool was

founded in 1972 and is one of the oldest Lamorinda preschools. The round building was constructed with the children in mind and belongs to the preschool, but the land is leased from the Town of Moraga. When director Susie Allison noticed last March that the roof was leaking, she knew it was the school's financial responsibility to repair it. "We had a tar and pebble roof that probably dated to the construction of the building," says Allison. "My husband sealed the roof so we could sustain classes during the winter; but we knew that major repair was in order."

Within a few weeks of spreading the word, almost half of the \$33,000 needed to repair the roof was raised. "Parents donated, but also grandparents, and 20 percent of our donors were alumni parents who do not have kids in the school anymore," says Harris. "That's because there is so much love for this school."

Since some of the beams had dry rot, and the school was closed in August, all the beams were cut back and angled, the dry rot was removed

and/or repaired, and the old roof was removed and replaced by a new polyvinyl chloride (PVC) roof. "It was all done within a week," Allison says.

Both of Harris' sons attended the preschool last year. She says the school turned her shy and reserved first born into an independent and confident kindergartner at Los Perales Elementary School this fall, and her turbulent second son finds a great outlet at Mulberry Tree, which offers boundaries for his energy. Concepts like conscious discipline are started early at 2 years old, giving students the vocabulary and the responsibility to exercise self-discipline. Harris also believes that the friendships parents form add to the attachment to the preschool.

"This preschool is such a warm nurturing place for our children," says Harris. "It is a safe traditional nursery school program that balances real academics, creativity and playtime."

For more information about Mulberry Tree, go to www.mulberry-treepreschool.com.

Swiss Movie 'Lovely Louise' Opens in Orinda Sept. 19

By Sophie Braccini



Annemarie Düringer portrays lovely Louise.

Photo provided

Annemarie Düringer was lovely when she was young; the Swiss actress who is playing Louise in the upcoming International Film Showcase screening of "Lovely Louise" at Orinda Theatre is still amazingly charming in her late 80s, obviously as strong as the character she portrays. "Lovely Louise" is an endearing bittersweet comedy, but don't get fooled by the title; Louise is not as lovely inside as she is outside, and the frail woman has more than one trick up her sleeve.

In the movie directed by Bettina Oberli, Louise and her son André are living a peaceful and somewhat mediocre life together, frozen in time, and mostly devoted to the reminiscence of Louise's budding Holly-

wood career that she gave up to take care of André, played by Stefan Kurt. The lovely sepiapicture is smashed to smithereens with the arrival of Bill (Stanley Townsend), a character who first appears to be one of Louise's fans.

The three main characters, starting with Louise, are cast to perfection, but André's transformation needs special mention. It could be shown in any acting class under the title: How to go from dull to seductive, or How to show the transformation of a character from half-dead to vibrant.

To an American audience, the Swiss-German film may run at a pace that can be a bit frustrating at times. Audience members should take the opportunity to relax and let the slower

pace of life win them over. Enjoy this movie for what it is: a poignant slice of life, bittersweet but hopeful, that leaves no unpleasant after taste, just a gentle smile and the desire to dance through life following a lighter beat.

"Lovely Louise" will play at the Orinda Theatre for one week beginning Sept. 19. For showtimes, visit <http://lamorindatheatre.com>. This showing is part of the International Film Showcase that screens distinguished foreign films each month that have been highlighted at festivals or abroad, and have never been commercially released in the area; some will never be available to rent or download. For more information about the showcase, visit <http://internationalshowcase.org/>.