

LPIE Art Teacher Retires

Submitted by Darwin Marable



Joan Marable

Photo provided

Joan Marable, one of several founding art teachers of the Lafayette Arts and Science Foundation (LASF) visual arts program, now the Lafayette Partners in Education (LPIE), is retiring.

Marable was born in Oakland and grew up in Alameda and attended Lincoln Elementary School where she was introduced to music and art as part of the curriculum. Joseph Pucci, her fifth-grade teacher, loved opera and would often enter the classroom singing an aria. He also arranged trips to the San Francisco Opera for his students. His nephew, Christopher Pucci, is currently an internationally renowned tenor. The school organized classroom competitions in which the students identified music and their composers.

Marable began ballet at age 4 and continued to dance while at UC Berkeley, attending master classes with both the Royale Ballet and George Balanchine, the father of American ballet. Music, dance and the visual arts became an integral part of her own arts education.

Her family moved to Moraga in 1952, and she attended Acalanes High School and UC Berkeley, majoring in both design and art history. After graduation, she worked as a home designer for Breuner's Department Store in Oakland and then as a freelance designer. In 2002, she designed, and with her family, built a modified New Mexico pueblo style home in Moraga.

She first entered teaching as a volunteer Head Start preschool teacher in East Oakland and then taught in parochial schools in San Leandro and also in the Midwest.

When LASF was founded in 1980 Marable was one of several art teachers hired and helped design the art program that included both art practice and art history. Prior to the founding of LASF, Marable volunteered to teach art in her daughter's third-grade classroom since no art of any kind was being taught in Lafayette's elementary schools. She then developed an after-school arts program at Burton Valley School integrating art practice with art history as she had done in her prior teaching. Her approach was integrated into LASF and became a key component

of the arts program.

Marable also created a series of classes focusing on famous artists. However, when she began teaching a class on Picasso, parents and staff were reluctant as they thought that it was too difficult for children to understand abstraction, simultaneity and negative space. However, her child-centered approach enabled the third graders to understand and easily discuss Cubism. She also introduced Alexander Calder's toy sculpture, "Circus," to the students and they were soon creating their own toy circus using wire, wood and Styrofoam.

Another innovative project involved the creative use of a Styrofoam cup to design a model for a larger abstract sculpture to be located in a public space. Using only scissors, glue and a Styrofoam cup the students created some very sophisticated and unique models.

Marable was waiting in line at a local restaurant several years ago when a young man walked up to her, hugged her and announced to the customers in line that Marable was his former art teacher and that he was graduating from California College of the Arts and planned to be an artist. The customers all began clapping as he also told his parents who were waiting outside that she was his former art teacher. He invited her to his senior art exhibition, which she attended.

In 2011, the Arts and Culture Commission of Contra Costa County recognized Marable's innovative contributions to teaching children's art through LPIE by awarding her with an Arts Recognition Award. LASF (LPIE) had previously received an Arts Recognition Award in 2005.

Marable says, "It has been a pleasure and very satisfying teaching art at all elementary grade levels throughout the years seeing the children's creativity emerge and develop. LPIE has provided me with the unique opportunity to teach through their innovative program that, not only supports creativity in art, but also in thinking and problem solving in general. While not all the children will become artists, they can learn to appreciate art, beauty and apply creative solutions to some of life's challenges."

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