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Arts shine on in Lamorinda

By Lou Fancher



Miramonte High School junior Jenni Coletta sings at Dec. 12 Lamorinda Arts Council's annual holiday luncheon. Photo Lou Fancher

During the Lamorinda Arts Council's annual holiday luncheon, instant proof of the organization's value arrives in the uplifted arms, snapping fingers, assertive singing and vocal proclamations of strength from local youth performers. In a private dining room at the Orinda Country Club on Dec. 12, LAC board members, community arts supporters and invited guests enjoyed French chicken topped with artichokes and capers or lemon-parmesan cod while being entertained by the cast of "The Addams Family" from Orinda Intermediate School's Bulldog Theatre (produced by Bay Area Children's Theater), a screening of Lamorinda ShortDocs 2018 winner, "The Homeless Project," and select Lamorinda Idol singers.

Both McKenna Rose, a third-grade student at Sleepy Hollow Elementary, and OIS eighth-grader Amelia Chen performed at the luncheon. During 2018 the LAC engine behind these powerful voices also displayed the visual artwork of 60 artists, 250 local high school students and 320 elementary and middle school students in exhibits held at the Orinda Library art gallery. Enthusiasm for the arts in Lamorinda as expressed through the council's activities this year supported not only the first-ever Arts Affair that showcased LAC partnerships with local arts organizations, but also Stanley Middle School student Neve Abcari's award-winning short documentary and the endeavors of Miramonte students Nejla Ackdoe-Pagey and Jenni Coletta, who delivered to the appreciative

audience sincere renditions of emotional, melodic tunes.

In opening statements at the luncheon, LAC Board Chairperson Jenny Staelin highlighted additional accomplishments that included, among others, October's Art of Mixology that raised nearly \$10,000, and a new, outdoor Arts Moves Project supported with \$9,000 from private donors, businesses and local foundations. For the first time, a "Spark the Arts" award was given, with honors in 2018 to Mark Coffey for editing and outreach related to the LAC newsletter. As an advocate for visual, performing and literary art produced and enjoyed by people of all ages, Staelin said LAC hopes always to cultivate activities that "bring us together, uplift our hearts, open our minds, educate our children and provide joy to all who experience them."

Staelin said future plans include expanding Arts Affair into an annual fundraiser. "We have to be careful not to overextend, because we're an entirely volunteer-run organization. (Managing Director Meredith Friedman is the sole paid staff position.) We had 120 people attend and this event has great potential." As an indicator, Arts Affair portends the type of initiative Staelin and the LAC plan to pursue with local organizations. "We'd love to partner more with Saint Mary's College, Town Hall Theatre, Cal Shakes. What can we do to bring artists together? We want to be the hub."

While an expanded branding effort launched four years ago increased visible connection of the LAC to events like Mixology and Orinda Idol that she says "just took off as if on a life of their own," Staelin said there's room-and-need-for more awareness. "We want the community to see us as that hub, but also to know we need their financial support to produce or sponsor these popular community events."

Perhaps community awareness of the LAC would crescendo by allowing people to hear 12-year-old OIS student June Lim belt out a show-stopping phrase from a musical or speak in quieter tones about the importance of art in her life. After creating a buzz with a compelling performance during dessert at the luncheon, June said, "My day would be a lot less fun without art. I love performing. I like to belt a lot. I feel strong." Claiming never to be nervous, confident in her capabilities and eager to master the next song, tap step or portrayal of a character, the young artist imagines infinite possibilities. It's nearly impossible to think of a greater gift to have given a child than this gift provided in part by the LAC and local community support.

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