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## A little bit of the tropics comes to Moraga

By Vera Kochan



Valerie Lee Ow with her Bouquets to Art re-creation Photos Vera Kochan

The Moraga Garden Club held its annual Spring Luncheon April 18 at the Holy Trinity Cultural Center in Moraga. True to their name, garden club members provided magnificent table centerpieces adhering to this year's tropical paradise theme entitled "Orchids Away."

The entire room was bathed with the scent of multi-colored and varying species of orchids. A virtual vacation for the olfactory glands. Centerpieces involved displays with boats, leis, Hawaiian statuary, bird cages, ornate pottery and even Easter egg ornaments.

The décor did not outshine the club members who came dressed in outfits bearing flower motifs.

As if all of this wasn't enough to prove what the Moraga Garden Club is all about, the luncheon's guest speaker sent the day's theme over the top. Valerie Lee Ow, proprietor of J. Miller Flowers and Gifts in Oakland, whipped up beautiful flower arrangements with such speed and precision, the crowd was left begging for more.

Ow, a 15-year member of the Lafayette Garden Club, has taken over the 49-year-old helm of her family-owned florist shop. If any proof was needed to confirm her skills as a master florist, Ow's creations have been featured in the de Young Museum's prestigious Bouquets to Art exhibit for 20 years.

This year's museum exhibition marks the 35th anniversary, and according to the DeYoung it's "one of the Museum's most popular events." It's a "weeklong display of floral designs inspired by the works of art in the de Young's galleries."

Explained Ow, "I didn't initially want to do the Bouquets to Art, because I'd have to drive into San Francisco every day to replenish the flowers." This year's displays feature the arrangements of 150 designers.

Ow's assignment this year is to florally replicate painter Frederic Edwin Church's masterpiece "Rainy Season in the Tropics."

"There are no awards or prizes," Ow said. "It's the thrill of being part of the event."

During the luncheon, Ow recreated several of her previous Bouquets to Art entries which her daughter, Jacqueline Ow, compared with copies of the original works of art.

When asked how a florist is chosen as a designer for the special exhibit, Ow informed the awestruck assemblage, "They go through your portfolio and visit your shop to make sure that you are equipped to handle the assignment and that your creations won't disappoint the patrons."

To see Ow's upcoming creation, visit the Bouquets to Art exhibit at The de Young Museum, June 4-9. Advance tickets are strongly recommended.



One of several centerpieces created by Moraga Garden Club members.

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