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New art installation at Moraga Commons brings added whimsy to the park

By Vera Kochan



Utility box artist Anna Shao Photo Vera Kochan

Situated among the trees along Moraga Road and between the two playgrounds stands a colorfully appliquéd utility box, entitled "Moraga Beauty," covered with various flowers and the town symbol - Bartlett pears.

The artist is Campolindo High School student Anna Shao, 16. "I've always loved nature and wildlife," stated Shao. "I wanted to make something that other people would enjoy."

The project started when Sue Olsen of The Olsen Team realtors approached Teresa Onoda, liaison to the town council for Art in Public Spaces. Olsen was interested in donating funds toward an art creation in town. Onoda decided to give a young artist a chance at local notoriety by "calling the Campolindo art teacher to see who would be the right person to do it." The decision was made to decorate a utility box that was owned by the town, because it didn't require council approval.

Shao wrapped her paper "canvas" around the sides and the top of the 6-foot by 3-foot utility box before first drawing her designs in pencil. "I wanted to do a collection of all the flowers I've seen in Moraga," Shao explained. "I did a lot of research on native plants and made modifications to highlight certain aspects of them." Her finished painting was then transferred onto another surface that would allow her art to cover the box in a shrink-wrap process much like applying contact paper.

Shao enjoyed this new experience of art creation from its inception in December to the installation at the Commons on June 17. "This was such a great opportunity for me to see what it would be like if I was going to pursue a career in art," Shao said. "It was really fun!"

Stating that this was a pilot program, Onoda said, "This one has been such a huge success, we might be open to more. I really want to thank Anna for her talent and her generosity and her time, and Sue Olsen for making this possible."

Shao has received glowing reviews from family and friends who have posted photos on social media. Onoda has heard positive comments such as: "Beautiful", "It has so much life to it", "It's a wonderful addition to the park", and "Who did it; are they professional?"

"Moraga stands for family, great schools, athletics and has all the potential in the world to stand for art," Onoda stated. "All of these elements increase the value of our homes and our lives. A small investment in art can provide a return worth millions of dollars in the increased values of our homes, plus it lifts our spirits."

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