

Published May 12th 2021

Miramonte students bring community together with gift of song

Submitted by Kathy Merchant



Six singers from Miramonte High School perform a Songram. Photo provided

After sheltering-in-place for six months and taking classes online due to the pandemic, Miramonte student Stef Moore knew she wanted to create something that helped keep people connected, especially during the isolating times of the pandemic.

That desire, combined with her love for singing, made Moore think of the first version of Songrams: high school students delivering a singing telegram (a Songram) in their neighborhoods to foster a sense of community and caring.

"I envisioned people in my small town sending each other songrams (for \$20 per song) and the money being donated to the Bay Area Rescue Mission, a local nonprofit organization providing shelter for the homeless," Moore said. "I thought this would be a brilliant way for singers to share their talent to help uplift others."

Moore pitched the idea to her choir teacher, Mr. Roberts, and he liked it so much he encouraged her to use his class time to recruit singers. "Having an idea is one thing, but having to 'sell' the idea to upperclassmen, to me, was a pretty daunting task. But after my presentations, I was thrilled that 13 singers had signed up to be part of Songrams!"

Two weeks later, they got their first "gig" to do a virtual Christmas performance for the Lafayette Happy Valley Garden Club. After a couple of hiccups, and a few of the singers dropping out, Moore came to realize the remaining singers were not only talented but also very committed and a couple of weeks later, people in their neighborhood started requesting songs. But just as they were about to go deliver their first in-person Songram, California went into another lockdown.

"I felt really bad for everyone who had already been feeling isolated and I thought of my elderly neighbor who had not left her home for eight months," Moore said. "That is when I came up with the idea of transitioning into e-cards." With e-cards, people could connect with friends and family living anywhere in the world without the uncertainty of COVID-19, but Moore didn't know if an e-card would have the same effect as delivering an in-person song. "It wasn't until we created an e-card that felt homemade and personal, that I knew we made the right choice."

Once their e-cards and website were ready to go, Moore reached out to Rainforest Trust. "We wanted to use Songrams as a platform to raise awareness to a cause important to us singers," Moore said. "As young adults, we are very concerned about climate change and the future of our planet. We decided to link Songrams with the Rainforest Trust because it buys land and works with local organizations to protect our rainforests."

While Moore says she isn't sure if Songrams will really take off and people will send each other e-cards, she says one thing is certain: "I have discovered the gratuitous generosity and kindness of people like Mr. Roberts, the Happy Valley Garden Club, the staff at Rainforest Trust, Songrams' members, our audio and video editor Miguel, and so many others.

"I think people support Songrams because they also believe in the importance of caring for each other and the environment," Moore added, "and lucky for us, that means affirming a handful of high school singers."

For more information or to order a Songram, go to www.songrams.com. To learn more about the Rainforest Trust, visit www.rainforesttrust.org.

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