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Photos courtesy Historical Society Lafayette and Jennifer Wake

What Park Theater renovation means for downtown Lafayette

By Lou Fancher

When asked about the Park Theater's preservation and significance, Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Jay Lifson says, "The Park has been iconic to what downtown Lafayette had been since the 1940s. Like many other small cities, (the presence of) a closed down movie house represents a (visible) scar, a left-over from what once was. Reimagining a new Park Theater represents what a changing Lafayette can be. Even a single two-screen theater is significant as an al-

ternative to multi-screen theaters that are nearby but will not offer the variety of experience that we envision with the planned format and redesign of the Park Theater."

After an arduous three-and-a-half year process, The Park Theater Trust (TPTT) on Dec. 16 announced it has successfully closed escrow and now owns the city's iconic, historic downtown theater. The all-volunteer nonprofit's rigorous exploration of 25 Bay Area for-profit theater operators included research, site visits to theaters, input from trade groups, as well as community town halls and forums held to gather feedback.

After extensive interviews and detailed analysis of the financials, management practices and RFPs (Response For Proposals) from four top candidates, the TPTT board selected CinemaSF as the theater operator.

CinemaSF is widely recognized in the Bay Area for its well-managed, small, independent cinemas such as the Balboa and Vogue in San Francisco. TPTT board member Jana Corey says their organization was looking for a theater operator with a strong financial track record, an experienced and deep management team, and a clear commitment to the community.

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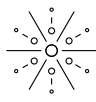
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Moraga's monarch habitat boasts two decoratively-themed sculptures to help boost its butterfly appeal



By Vera Kochan

The Moraga Garden Club's efforts to help encourage the repopulation of the endangered monarch butterfly has been met with success. Following along the theme of "If you built it, they will come," the habitat, located in Rancho Laguna Park, has had monarch sightings as hopeful as those throughout California.

After an all-time state low of 1,914 last year, the Xerces Society (<https://xerces.org>), a science-based nonprofit environmental organization, was thrilled to report that in October 2021, "over 1,300 monarchs were counted at the Pacific Grove overwintering site; this site did not have a single monarch butterfly during last year's count." The Pismo State Beach Monarch Butterfly Grove and an adjacent site accounted for approximately 8,000 monarchs as opposed to 300 from the prior year. Even more inspiring, observations and reports from volunteers and the public throughout the Bay Area, Santa Cruz, Monterey, Big Sur, Ventura and Los Angeles have made Xerces expand the estimates to over 10,000 monarchs easily accounted for.

The nearly 99.9% decline from the overwintering monarchs of the 1980s in California is largely attributed to encroachment by humans into their habitat

and to pesticides. "Populations of monarch butterflies, like other insects, can fluctuate from year to year, in response to the temperature, rainfall, the availability of food, and other factors," according to the website. "Though we are likely to see increases in the size of the western monarch population this year, it is likely to still be dangerously close to extinction, and there remains an urgent need to address the threats that this butterfly faces."

Adding to the appeal of the habitat itself are two new sculptures meant to be interactive with the public. "Wings," created by artist Patrick E. (the E stands for entomology) is over 5-feet tall and made of metal. The other sculpture is titled "Katy Pillar" by artist Mary Gilles. Made of glass mosaic, the caterpillar-like piece is found within the habitat hidden amongst the vegetation. Both sculptures are securely bolted to underground slabs of cement.

"Wings" creator, Patrick Condon (www.patrick-e.com), has been making original sculptures out of metal and glass since 1995, using metalworking and mosaicing techniques. Most of his art includes giant insects with a ladybug being his first foray into public art. The monarch piece was commissioned by the MGC and funded by a private donor.

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Amy Stagg interacts with "Wings." Photo Julie Stagg

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