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Local teens bring Spring Fest advocacy to Moraga Commons Park

By Vera Kochan



Spring Fest organizer, Isabelle Bennette, amidst the many booths May 14 at Moraga Commons Park. Photo Vera Kochan

The first of its kind local event is the brainchild of Miramonte High School senior Isabelle Bennette. Held at the Moraga Commons Park on May 14, Spring Fest was titled to celebrate the season and the theme of "springing into action" with regards to initiatives and advocacy affecting youth and the community.

Bennette originally came up with the idea "during the Black Lives Matter movement in the summer of 2020. It began as a cultural fair only a few months ago." Many of the nearly 30 organizations provided ways for the community to engage in active causes.

While Georgetown University-bound Bennette was the primary organizer, the Acalanes Union High School District hosted the event and the Moraga Youth Involvement Committee's (Parks and Recreation Department) sponsorship allowed the basically student-run Spring Fest to blossom. Miramonte, Campolindo, Acalanes and Las Lomas students all had a hand in some

type of participation.

Student bands entertained at the bandshell; a Wall of Compliments allowed folks to add encouraging remarks to strangers; a Collaborative Mural meshed individual artwork into one; and a cultural fashion show displayed the beauty of global differences through traditional costumes. A food truck was on hand in addition to several cultural food offerings at participating booths.

"When I first began brainstorming for this event," Bennette explained, "I met with district-wide student forums that helped me get an idea of what students wanted a district-wide event to look like."

Scores of advocacy-related organizations were well represented: Asian Student Union's Bring Change to Mind (end the stigma of mental illness); Advocates for Immigrants and Refugees; Youth Leadership Commission of Walnut Creek (registering voters); STEM in Action; Rainbow Community Center; Miramonte SAGA (Sexuality and Gender Alliance); Amnesty Orinda (International); Latinos Unidos Club (Las Lomas); Moraga iKind; Latinix Club (Miramonte); Save Mount Diablo; PFLAG Lamorinda; Writer's Magazine (Miramonte); Lamorinda Arts Council; Rossmoor Advocates for Diversity; Keeping Our Promise (tutor Afghan refugees); Miramonte Robotics Team 8751 The Wild Bulls; Diversity Consciousness Committee; and Las Lomas Stands for Ukraine (proceeds from all sales went to RAZOM which in Ukrainian means together).

Student entrepreneurs were also in evidence: Hand-printed and hand-crafted tote bags, postcards, prints and earrings by Aki Yoshie; Aqua Jewelry (gold and silver-plated - with 10% of proceeds going to teen suicide prevention) by Kirstin Parker; artwork "exploring the way that we could change the view of death in a pro-social way" by Annika Salamon; a henna design booth; bead jewelry kits for kids by A. M. Briggs; and artwork by Ilana Roginsky (a portion of sales went toward Ukraine relief).

"This event is really a tribute to active students, whether they are artists, entrepreneurs, scientists, advocates, or leaders," stated Bennette. "Putting together Spring Fest has been an incredibly heartwarming experience as I saw how much our community has been and continues to advocate for marginalized peoples; create educational and vulnerable spaces; and put in tons of time and energy to support others."

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