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Orinda City Council honors Anne J. Parr for nearly a half century of art classes



Anne J. Parr

Photo Colleen Winans

By Sora O'Doherty

At the recommendation of city staff and the instigation of Orinda City Council member Amy Worth, Orinda has decided to mount a plaque honoring Anne J. Parr for nearly 50 years of teaching art classes to children at the Orinda Community Center. From before the incorporation of the city of Orinda, Parr could be found at the Orinda Community Center teaching art to Orinda's young students, as well as to their mothers. Interviewed by The Lamorinda Weekly, Parr emphasized how much she loved being able to guide children to express themselves through art.

The plaque will be installed in the Community Center, dedicating the Anne J. Parr Clay & Kiln Room. The text of the plaque honors Parr "for nearly 50 years teaching children's clay programs and providing unforgettable experiences for hundreds of community youth." Worth said that she still has a number of clay figures her children made in Parr's classes, and that they remain favored toys of her grandchildren now. Parr says, "I still run into people who'll say, 'I was in the 3:30 class,' and they are now there with their own children."

"It was as much a social thing as an art thing," Parr said. It was a place for children

and their mothers to come and make friends. Parr too met so many people through her work at the Community Center. She recalls that her focus was on helping each student to use their own creativity. She started with Saturday Happenings, two-hour art classes with no sign-up required. Kids would just drop into the old multi-purpose room. Parr said that the children loved coming, and she would mix up different ages in groups, which they also loved. She also brought in Girl Scouts as helpers, including her own six daughters. Parr added that in those days, the community center let you have a helper, and she hired many children for whom it was their first job.

According to Parr, her real talent is getting things out of other people. She was more of a teacher than an artist. "Some were kids having a difficult time in school, and coming to art classes was a whole different thing," she recalled.

Parr went to UC Berkeley, where she volunteered for many things, and was often using art in her volunteer endeavors. She majored in English, history and science. Someone suggested that she teach the classes in ceramics because she had done a lot of ceramics, painting and printing in her volunteer work.

In her late 80s, Parr still lives in the family home in Sleepy Hollow. She remains very active, going to the local gym, meeting with her multigeneration coffee klatch, book club, etc. Of her six daughters, five live relatively close and one, Colleen Winans, lives in Maryland. "At some point," Winans says, "all of us worked in Mom's classes, either with the Girl Scouts or individually." She remembers it being lots of fun, and says that all the sisters have an interest in art because of her mom. "She did a ton of different things in classes: collages, painting, you name it," Winans recalls. "We had a huge mail box in front of our house and folks would drop off things that Mom needed for different projects." The classes at the Community Center cost about 75 cents a class. Parr would display the children's creations in the window of the book store in Orinda, which is now Orinda Books.

Parr is a bit sad to have given up the art classes during the pandemic. "I was kind of sorry to have it wind up the way it did," she said, "but timing is everything." The plaque in the Community Center will assure that Parr will long be remembered for the wonderful work she did there.



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